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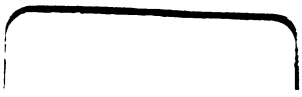

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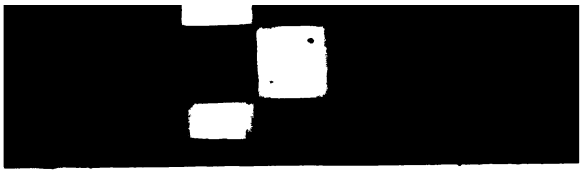

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I closed my eyes, and said to Louis, 'Endeavour to ascertain what she means.'

THE WOMAN IN WHITE

By

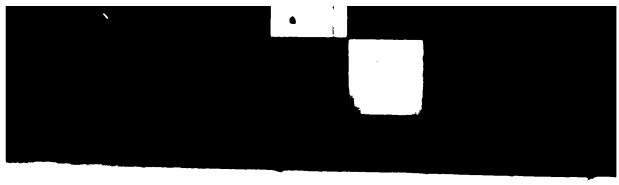
WILKIE COLLINS

Illustrated by

W. SHERMAN PETTS

VOLUME II

Charles Scribner's Sons
New York . . . 1903



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THE WOMAN IN WHITE

THE SECOND EPOCH (*Continued*)

The Story continued by FREDERICK FAIRLIE, ESQ., *of Limmeridge House.**

It is the grand misfortune of my life that nobody will let me alone.

Why—I ask everybody—why worry *me?* Nobody answers that question; and nobody lets me alone. Relatives, friends, and strangers all combine to annoy me. What have I done? I ask myself, I ask my servant, Louis, fifty times a day—what have I done? Neither of us can tell. Most extraordinary!

The last annoyance that has assailed me is the annoyance of being called upon to write this Narrative. Is a man in my state of nervous wretchedness capable of writing narratives? When I put this extremely reasonable objection, I am told that certain very serious events, relating to my niece, have happened within my experience; and that I am the fit person to describe them on that account. I am threatened, if I fail to exert myself in the manner required, with consequences which I cannot so much as think of, without perfect prostration. There is really no need to threaten me. Shattered by my miserable health and my family

* The manner in which Mr. Fairlie's Narrative, and other Narratives that are shortly to follow it, were originally obtained, forms the subject of an explanation which will appear at a later period.

troubles, I am incapable of resistance. If you insist, you take your unjust advantage of me; and I give way immediately. I will endeavour to remember what I can (under protest), and to write what I can (also under protest); and what I can't remember and can't write, Louis must remember, and write for me. He is an ass, and I am an invalid: and we are likely to make all sorts of mistakes between us. How humiliating!

I am told to remember dates. Good Heavens! I never did such a thing in my life—how am I to begin now?

I have asked Louis. He is not quite such an ass as I have hitherto supposed. He remembers the date of the event, within a week or two—and I remember the name of the person. The date was towards the end of June, or the beginning of July; and the name (in my opinion a remarkably vulgar one) was Fanny.

At the end of June, or the beginning of July, then, I was reclining, in my customary state, surrounded by the various objects of Art which I have collected about me to improve the taste of the barbarous people in my neighbourhood. That is to say, I had the photographs of my pictures, and prints, and coins, and so forth, all about me, which I intend, one of these days, to present (the photographs, I mean, if the clumsy English language will let me mean anything)—to present to the Institution at Carlisle (horrid place!), with a view to improving the tastes of the Members (Goths and Vandals to a man). It might be supposed that a gentleman who was in course of conferring a great national benefit on his countrymen, was the last gentleman in the world to be unfeelingly worried about private difficulties and family affairs. Quite a mistake, I assure you, in my case.

However, there I was, reclining, with my art-treas-

ures about me, and wanting a quiet morning. Because I wanted a quiet morning, of course, Louis came in. It was perfectly natural that I should inquire what the deuce he meant by making his appearance, when I had not rung my bell. I seldom swear—it is such an ungentlemanlike habit—but when Louis answered by a grin, I think it was also perfectly natural that I should damn him for grinning. At any rate, I did.

This rigorous mode of treatment, I have observed, invariably brings persons in the lower class of life to their senses. It brought Louis to *his* senses. He was so obliging as to leave off grinning, and inform me that a Young Person was outside, wanting to see me. He added (with the odious talkativeness of servants), that her name was Fanny.

'Who is Fanny?'

'Lady Glyde's maid, sir.'

'What does Lady Glyde's maid want with *me?*'

'A letter, sir—'

'Take it.'

'She refuses to give it to anybody but you, sir.'

'Who sends the letter?'

'Miss Halcombe, sir.'

The moment I heard Miss Halcombe's name, I gave up. It is a habit of mine always to give up to Miss Halcombe. I find, by experience, that it saves noise. I gave up on this occasion. Dear Marian!

'Let Lady Glyde's maid come in, Louis. Stop! Do her shoes creak?'

I was obliged to ask the question. Creaking shoes invariably upset me for the day. I was resigned to see the Young Person, but I was *not* resigned to let the Young Person's shoes upset me. There is a limit even to my endurance.

Louis affirmed distinctly that her shoes were to be depended upon. I waved my hand. He introduced her. Is it necessary to say that she expressed her sense of embarrassment by shutting up her mouth and breathing through her nose? To the student of female human nature in the lower orders, surely not.

Let me do the girl justice. Her shoes did *not* creak. But why do Young Persons in service all perspire at the hands? Why have they all got fat noses and hard cheeks? And why are their faces so sadly unfinished, especially about the corners of the eyelids? I am not strong enough to think deeply myself, on any subject; but I appeal to professional men who are. Why have we no variety in our breed of Young Persons?

'You have a letter for me, from Miss Halcombe? Put it down on the table, please; and don't upset anything. How is Miss Halcombe?'

'Very well, thank you, sir.'

'And Lady Glyde?'

I received no answer. The Young Person's face became more unfinished than ever; and, I think she began to cry. I certainly saw something moist about her eyes. Tears or perspiration. Louis (whom I have just consulted) is inclined to think, tears. He is in her class of life; and he ought to know best. Let us say, tears.

Except when the refining process of Art judiciously removes from them all resemblance to Nature, I distinctly object to tears. Tears are scientifically described as a Secretion. I can understand that a secretion may be healthy or unhealthy, but I cannot see the interest of a secretion from a sentimental point of view. Perhaps my own secretions being all wrong together, I am a little prejudiced on the subject. No matter. I

behaved, on this occasion, with all possible propriety and feeling. I closed my eyes, and said to Louis,

'Endeavour to ascertain what she means.'

Louis endeavoured, and the Young Person endeavoured. They succeeded in confusing each other to such an extent that I am bound in common gratitude to say, they really amused me. I think I shall send for them again when I am in low spirits. I have just mentioned this idea to Louis. Strange to say, it seems to make him uncomfortable. Poor devil!

Surely, I am not expected to repeat my niece's maid's explanation of her tears, interpreted in the English of my Swiss valet? The thing is manifestly impossible. I can give my own impressions and feelings perhaps. Will that do as well? Please say, Yes.

My idea is that she began by telling me (through Louis) that her master had dismissed her from her mistress's service. (Observe, throughout, the strange irrelevancy of the Young Person. Was it my fault that she had lost her place?) On her dismissal, she had gone to the inn to sleep. (*I* don't keep the inn—why mention it to *me?*) Between six o'clock and seven, Miss Halcombe had come to say good-by, and had given her two letters, one for me, and one for a gentleman in London. (*I* am not a gentleman in London—hang the gentleman in London!) She had carefully put the two letters into her bosom (what have I to do with her bosom?); she had been very unhappy, when Miss Halcombe had gone away again; she had not had the heart to put bit or drop between her lips till it was near bedtime; and then, when it was close on nine o'clock, she had thought she should like a cup of tea. (Am I responsible for any of these vulgar fluctuations which begin with unhappiness and end with tea?)

Just as she was *warming the pot* (I give the words on the authority of Louis, who says he knows what they mean, and wishes to explain, but I snub him on principle)—just as she was warming the pot, the door opened, and she was *struck of a heap* (her own words again, and perfectly unintelligible, this time, to Louis, as well as to myself) by the appearance, in the inn parlour, of her ladyship, the Countess. I give my niece's maid's description of my sister's title with a sense of the highest relish. My poor dear sister is a tiresome woman who married a foreigner. To resume: the door opened; her ladyship, the Countess, appeared in the parlour, and the Young Person was struck of a heap. Most remarkable!

I must really rest a little before I can get on any farther. When I have reclined for a few minutes, with my eyes closed, and when Louis has refreshed my poor aching temples with a little eau-de-Cologne, I may be able to proceed.

Her ladyship, the Countess——

No. I am able to proceed, but not to sit up. I will recline and dictate. Louis has a horrid accent; but he knows the language, and can write. How very convenient!

Her ladyship, the Countess, explained her unexpected appearance at the inn by telling Fanny that she had come to bring one or two little messages which Miss Halcombe, in her hurry, had forgotten. The Young Person thereupon waited anxiously to hear what the messages were; but the Countess seemed disinclined to mention them (so like my sister's tiresome way!), until Fanny had had her tea. Her ladyship was surprisingly kind and thoughtful about it (extremely unlike

my sister), and said, 'I am sure, my poor girl, you must want your tea. We can let the messages wait till afterwards. Come, come, if nothing else will put you at your ease, I'll make the tea, and have a cup with you.' I think those were the words, as reported excitably, in my presence, by the Young Person. At any rate, the Countess insisted on making the tea, and carried her ridiculous ostentation of humility so far as to take one cup herself, and to insist on the girl's taking the other. The girl drank the tea; and, according to her own account, solemnised the extraordinary occasion, five minutes afterwards, by fainting dead away, for the first time in her life. Here again, I use her own words. Louis thinks they were accompanied by an increased secretion of tears. I can't say, myself. The effort of listening being quite as much as I could manage, my eyes were closed.

Where did I leave off? Ah, yes—she fainted, after drinking a cup of tea with the Countess: a proceeding which might have interested me, if I had been her medical man; but, being nothing of the sort, I felt bored by hearing of it, nothing more. When she came to herself, in half an hour's time, she was on the sofa, and nobody was with her but the landlady. The Countess, finding it too late to remain any longer at the inn, had gone away as soon as the girl showed signs of recovering; and the landlady had been good enough to help her up-stairs to bed.

Left by herself, she had felt in her bosom (I regret the necessity of referring to this part of the subject a second time), and had found the two letters there, quite safe, but strangely crumpled. She had been giddy in the night ; but had got up well enough to travel in the morning. She had put the letter addressed to that

obtrusive stranger, the gentleman in London, into the post; and had now delivered the other letter into my hands, as she was told. This was the plain truth; and, though she could not blame herself for any intentional neglect, she was sadly troubled in her mind, and sadly in want of a word of advice. At this point, Louis thinks the secretions appeared again. Perhaps they did; but it is of infinitely greater importance to mention that, at this point also, I lost my patience, opened my eyes, and interfered.

'What is the purport of all this?' I inquired.

My niece's irrelevant maid stared, and stood speechless.

'Endeavour to explain,' I said to my servant. 'Translate me, Louis.'

Louis endeavoured, and translated. In other words, he descended immediately into a bottomless pit of confusion; and the Young Person followed him down. I really don't know when I have been so amused. I left them at the bottom of the pit, as long as they diverted me. When they ceased to divert me, I exerted my intelligence, and pulled them up again.

It is unnecessary to say that my interference enabled me, in due course of time, to ascertain the purport of the Young Person's remarks.

I discovered that she was uneasy in her mind, because the train of events that she had just described to me, had prevented her from receiving those supplementary messages which Miss Halcombe had intrusted to the Countess to deliver. She was afraid the messages might have been of great importance to her mistress's interests. Her dread of Sir Percival had deterred her from going to Blackwater Park late at night to inquire about them; and Miss Halcombe's own directions to her, on no

account to miss the train in the morning, had prevented her from waiting at the inn the next day. She was most anxious that the misfortune of her fainting-fit should not lead to the second misfortune of making her mistress think her neglectful, and she would humbly beg to ask me whether I would advise her to write her explanations and excuses to Miss Halcombe, requesting to receive the messages by letter, if it was not too late. I make no apologies for this extremely prosy paragraph. I have been ordered to write it. There are people, unaccountable as it may appear, who actually take more interest in what my niece's maid said to me on this occasion, than in what I said to my niece's maid. Amusing perversity.'

'I should feel very much obliged to you, sir, if you would kindly tell me what I had better do,' remarked the Young Person.

'Let things stop as they are,' I said, adapting my language to my listener. '*I* invariably let things stop as they are. Yes. Is that all?'

'If you think it would be a liberty in me, sir, to write, of course I wouldn't venture to do so. But I am so very anxious to do all I can to serve my mistress faithfully——'

People in the lower class of life never know when or how to go out of a room. They invariably require to be helped out by their betters. I thought it high time to help the Young Person out. *I* did it with two judicious words:

'Good morning!'

Something, outside or inside this singular girl, suddenly creaked. Louis, who was looking at her (which I was not), says she creaked when she curtseyed. Curious. Was it her shoes, her stays, or

her bones? Louis thinks it was her stays. Most extraordinary!

As soon as I was left by myself, I had a little nap—I really wanted it. When I awoke again, I noticed dear Marian's letter. If I had had the least idea of what it contained, I should certainly not have attempted to open it. Being, unfortunately for myself, quite innocent of all suspicion, I read the letter. It immediately upset me for the day.

I am, by nature, one of the most easy-tempered creatures that ever lived—I make allowances for everybody, and I take offence at nothing. But, as I have before remarked, there are limits to my endurance. I laid down Marian's letter, and felt myself—justly felt myself—an injured man.

I am about to make a remark. It is, of course, applicable to the very serious matter now under notice —or I should not allow it to appear in this place.

Nothing, in my opinion, sets the odious selfishness of mankind in such a repulsively vivid light, as the treatment, in all classes of society, which the Single people receive at the hands of the Married people. When you have once shown yourself too considerate and self-denying to add a family of your own to an already overcrowded population, you are vindictively marked out by your married friends, who have no similar consideration and no similar self-denial, as the recipient of half their conjugal troubles, and the born friend of all their children. Husbands and wives *talk* of the cares of matrimony; and bachelors and spinsters *bear* them. Take my own case, I considerately remain single; and my poor dear brother, Philip, inconsiderately marries. What does he do when he dies? He

leaves his daughter to *me*. She is a sweet girl. She is also a dreadful responsibility. Why lay her on my shoulders? Because I am bound, in the harmless character of a single man, to relieve my married connexions of all their own troubles. I do my best with my brother's responsibility; I marry my niece, with infinite fuss and difficulty to the man her father wanted her to marry. She and her husband disagree, and unpleasant consequences follow. What does she do with those consequences? She transfers them to *me*. Why transfer them to *me?* Because I am bound, in the harmless character of a single man, to relieve my married connexions of all their own troubles. Poor single people! Poor human nature!

It is quite unnecessary to say that Marian's letter threatened me. Everybody threatens me. All sorts of horrors were to fall on my devoted head, if I hesitated to turn Limmeridge House into an asylum for my niece and her misfortunes. I did hesitate, nevertheless.

I have mentioned that my usual course, hitherto, had been to submit to dear Marian, and save noise. But, on this occasion, the consequences involved in her extremely inconsiderate proposal, were of a nature to make me pause. If I opened Limmeridge House as an asylum to Lady Glyde, what security had I against Sir Percival Glyde's following her here, in a state of violent resentment against *me* for harbouring his wife? I saw such a perfect labyrinth of troubles involved in this proceeding, that I determined to feel my ground, as it were. I wrote, therefore, to dear Marian, to beg (as she had no husband to lay claim to her) that she would come here by herself, first, and talk the matter over with me. If she could answer my objections to my own perfect satisfaction, then I assured her that I

would receive our sweet Laura with the greatest pleasure—but not otherwise.

I felt of course, at the time, that this temporising, on my part, would probably end in bringing Marian here in a state of virtuous indignation, banging doors. But, then, the other course of proceeding might end in bringing Sir Percival here in a state of virtuous indignation, banging doors also; and, of the two indignations and bangings, I preferred Marian's—because I was used to her. Accordingly, I despatched the letter by return of post. It gained me time, at all events—and, oh dear me! what a point that was to begin with.

When I am totally prostrated (did I mention that I was totally prostrated by Marian's letter?), it always takes me three days to get up again. I was very unreasonable—I expected three days of quiet. Of course I didn't get them.

The third day's post brought me a most impertinent letter from a person with whom I was totally unacquainted. He described himself as the acting partner of our man of business—our dear pig-headed old Gilmore—and he informed me that he had lately received, by the post, a letter addressed to him in Miss Halcombe's handwriting. On opening the envelope, he had discovered, to his astonishment, that it contained nothing but a blank sheet of note paper. This circumstance appeared to him so suspicious (as suggesting to his restless legal mind that the letter had been tampered with) that he had at once written to Miss Halcombe, and had received no answer by return of post. In this difficulty, instead of acting like a sensible man and letting things take their proper course; his next absurd proceeding, on his own showing, was to pester me, by writing to inquire if I knew anything about it.

What the deuce should I know about it? Why alarm *me* as well as himself? I wrote back to that effect. It was one of my keenest letters. I have produced nothing with a sharper epistolary edge to it, since I tendered his dismissal in writing to that extremely troublesome person, Mr. Walter Hartright.

My letter produced its effect. I heard nothing more from the lawyer.

This perhaps was not altogether surprising. But it was certainly a remarkable circumstance that no second letter reached me from Marian, and that no warning signs appeared of her arrival. Her unexpected absence did me amazing good. It was so very soothing and pleasant to infer (as I did of course) that my married connexions had made it up again. Five days of undisturbed tranquillity, of delicious single blessedness, quite restored me. On the sixth day, I felt strong enough to send for my photographer, and to set him at work again on the presentation copies of my art-treasures, with a view, as I have already mentioned, to the improvement of taste in this barbarous neighbourhood. I had just dismissed him to his workshop, and had just begun coquetting with my coins, when Louis suddenly made his appearance with a card in his hand.

'Another Young Person?' I said. 'I won't see her. In my state of health, Young Persons disagree with me. Not at home.'

'It is a gentleman this time, sir.'

A gentleman of course made a difference. I looked at the card.

Gracious Heaven! my tiresome sister's foreign husband, Count Fosco.

Is it necessary to say what my first impression was,

when I looked at my visitor's card? Surely not? My sister having married a foreigner, there was but one impression that any man in his senses could possibly feel. Of course the Count had come to borrow money of me.

'Louis,' I said, 'do you think he would go away, if you gave him five shillings?'

Louis looked quite shocked. He surprised me inexpressibly, by declaring that my sister's foreign husband was dressed superbly, and looked the picture of prosperity. Under these circumstances, my first impression altered to a certain extent. I now took it for granted, that the Count had matrimonial difficulties of his own to contend with, and that he had come, like the rest of the family, to cast them all on my shoulders.

'Did he mention his business?' I asked.

'Count Fosco said he had come here, sir, because Miss Halcombe was unable to leave Blackwater Park.'

Fresh troubles, apparently. Not exactly his own, as I had supposed, but dear Marian's. Troubles, any way. Oh dear!'

'Show him in,' I said, resignedly.

The Count's first appearance really startled me. He was such an alarmingly large person, that I quite trembled. I felt certain that he would shake the floor, and knock down my art-treasures. He did neither the one nor the other. He was refreshingly dressed in summer costume; his manner was delightfully self-possessed and quiet—he had a charming smile. My first impression of him was highly favourable. It is not creditable to my penetration—as the sequel will show—to acknowledge this; but I am a naturally candid man, and I *do* acknowledge it, notwithstanding.

'Allow me to present myself, Mr. Fairlie,' he said. 'I come from Blackwater Park, and I have the honour and the happiness of being Madame Fosco's husband. Let me take my first, and last, advantage of that circumstance, by entreating you not to make a stranger of me. I beg you will not disturb yourself—I beg you will not move.'

'You are very good,' I replied. 'I wish I was strong enough to get up. Charmed to see you at Limmeridge. Please take a chair.'

'I am afraid you are suffering to-day,' said the Count.

'As usual,' I said. 'I am nothing but a bundle of nerves dressed up to look like a man.'

'I have studied many subjects in my time,' remarked this sympathetic person. 'Among others the inexhaustible subject of nerves. May I make a suggestion, at once the simplest and the most profound? Will you let me alter the light in your room?'

'Certainly—if you will be so very kind as not to let any of it in on me.'

He walked to the window. Such a contrast to dear Marian! so extremely considerate in all his movements!

'Light,' he said, in that delightfully confidential tone which is so soothing to an invalid, 'is the first essential. Light stimulates, nourishes, preserves. You can no more do without it, Mr. Fairlie, than if you were a flower. Observe. Here, where you sit, I close the shutters, to compose you. There, where you do *not* sit, I draw up the blind and let in the invigorating sun. Admit the light into your room, if you cannot bear it on yourself. Light, sir, is the grand decree of Providence. You accept Providence with your own restrictions. Accept light—on the same terms.'

I thought this very convincing and attentive. He had

taken me in—up to that point about the light, he had certainly taken me in.

'You see me confused,' he said, returning to his place —'on my word of honour, Mr. Fairlie, you see me confused in your presence.'

'Shocked to hear it, I am sure. May I inquire why?'

'Sir, can I enter this room (where you sit a sufferer), and see you surrounded by these admirable objects of Art, without discovering that you are a man whose feelings are acutely impressionable, whose sympathies are perpetually alive? Tell me can I do this?'

If I had been strong enough to sit up in my chair, I should of course have bowed. Not being strong enough, I smiled my acknowledgments instead. It did just as well, we both understood one another.

'Pray follow my train of thought,' continued the Count. 'I sit here, a man of refined sympathies myself, in the presence of another man of refined sympathies also. I am conscious of a terrible necessity for lacerating those sympathies by referring to domestic events of a very melancholy kind. What is the inevitable consequence? I have done myself the honour of pointing it out to you, already. I sit confused.'

Was it at this point that I began to suspect he was going to bore me? I rather think it was.

'Is it absolutely necessary to refer to these unplesant matters?' I inquired. 'In our homely English phrase, Count Fosco, won't they keep?'

The Count, with the most alarming solemnity, sighed and shook his head.

'Must I really hear them?'

He shrugged his shoulders (it was the first foreign thing he had done, since he had been in the room); and looked at me in an unpleasantly penetrating manner.

My instincts told me that I had better close my eyes. I obeyed my instincts.

'Please break it gently,' I pleaded. 'Anybody dead?'

'Dead!' cried the Count, with unnecessary foreign fierceness. 'Mr. Fairlie! your national composure terrifies me. In the name of Heaven, what have I said, or done, to make you think me the messenger of death?'

'Pray accept my apologies,' I answered. 'You have said and done nothing. I make it a rule, in these distressing cases, always to anticipate the worst. It breaks the blow, by meeting it half way, and so on. Inexpressibly relieved, I am sure, to hear that nobody is dead. Anybody ill?'

I opened my eyes, and looked at him. Was he very yellow, when he came in? or had he turned very yellow, in the last minute or two? I really can't say; and I can't ask Louis, because he was not in the room at the time.

'Anybody ill?' I repeated; observing that my national composure still appeared to affect him.

'That is part of my bad news, Mr. Fairlie. Yes. Somebody is ill.'

'Grieved, I am sure. Which of them is it?'

'To my profound sorrow, Miss Halcombe. Perhaps you were in some degree prepared to hear this? Perhaps, when you found that Miss Halcombe did not come here by herself, as you proposed, and did not write a second time, your affectionate anxiety may have made you fear that she was ill?'

I have no doubt my affectionate anxiety had led to that melancholy apprehension, at some time or other; but, at the moment, my wretched memory entirely failed to remind me of the circumstance. However, I said, Yes, in justice to myself. I was much shocked.

It was so very uncharacteristic of such a robust person as dear Marian to be ill, that I could only suppose she had met with an accident. A horse, or a false step on the stairs, or something of that sort.

'Is it serious?' I asked.

'Serious—beyond a doubt,' he replied. 'Dangerous—I hope and trust not. Miss Halcombe unhappily exposed herself to be wetted through by a heavy rain. The cold that followed was of an aggravated kind; and it has now brought with it the worst consequence—Fever.'

When I heard the word, Fever, and when I remembered, at the same moment, that the unscrupulous person who was now addressing me had just come from Blackwater Park, I thought I should have fainted on the spot.

'Good God!' I said. 'Is it infectious?'

'Not at present,' he answered, with detestable composure. 'It may turn to infection—but no such deplorable complication had taken place when I left Blackwater Park. I have felt the deepest interest in the case, Mr. Fairlie—I have endeavoured to assist the regular medical attendant in watching it—accept my personal assurances of the uninfectious nature of the fever, when I last saw it.'

Accept his assurances! I never was farther from accepting anything in my life. I would not have believed him on his oath. He was too yellow to be believed. He looked like a walking-West-Indian-epidemic. He was big enough to carry typhus by the ton, and to dye the very carpet he walked on with scarlet fever. In certain emergencies, my mind is remarkably soon made up. I instantly determined to get rid of him.

'You will kindly excuse an invalid,' I said—'but long

conferences of any kind invariably upset me. May I beg to know exactly what the object is to which I am indebted for the honour of your visit?'

I fervently hoped that this remarkably broad hint would throw him off his balance—confuse him—reduce him to polite apologies—in short, get him out of the room. On the contrary, it only settled him in his chair. He became additionally solemn and dignified and confidential. He held up two of his horrid fingers, and gave me another of his unpleasantly penetrating looks. What was I to do? I was not strong enough to quarrel with him. Conceive my situation, if you please. Is language adequate to describe it? I think not.

'The objects of my visit,' he went on, quite irrepressibly, 'are numbered on my fingers. They are two. First, I come to bear my testimony, with profound sorrow, to the lamentable disagreements between Sir Percival and Lady Glyde. I am Sir Percival's oldest friend; I am related to Lady Glyde by marriage; I am an eye-witness of all that has happened at Blackwater Park. In those three capacities I speak with authority, with confidence, with honourable regret. Sir! I inform you, as the head of Lady Glyde's family, that Miss Halcombe has exaggerated nothing in the letter which she wrote to your address. I affirm that the remedy which that admirable lady has proposed, is the only remedy that will spare you the horrors of public scandal. A temporary separation between husband and wife is the one peaceable solution of this difficulty. Part them for the present; and when all causes of irritation are removed, I, who have now the honour of addressing you—I will undertake to bring Sir Percival to reason. Lady Glyde is innocent, Lady Glyde is injured; but—follow my thought here!—she is, on that very account

(I say it with shame), the cause of irritation while she remains under her husband's roof. No other house can receive her with propriety, but yours. I invite you to open it!'

Cool. Here was a matrimonial hailstorm pouring in the South of England; and I was invited, by a man with fever in every fold of his coat, to come out from the North of England, and take my share of the pelting. I tried to put the point forcibly, just as I have put it here. The Count deliberately lowered one of his horrid fingers; kept the other up; and went on—rode over me, as it were, without even the common coachmanlike attention of crying 'Hi!' before he knocked me down.

'Follow my thought once more, if you please,' he resumed. 'My first object you have heard. My second object in coming to this house is to do what Miss Halcombe's illness has prevented her from doing for herself. My large experience is consulted on all difficult matters at Blackwater Park; and my friendly advice was requested on the interesting subject of your letter to Miss Halcombe. I understood at once—for my sympathies are your sympathies—why you wished to see her here, before you pledged yourself to inviting Lady Glyde. You are most right, sir, in hesitating to receive the wife, until you are quite certain that the husband will not exert his authority to reclaim her. I agree to that. I also agree that such delicate explanations as this difficulty involves, are not explanations which can be properly disposed of by writing only. My presence here (to my own great inconvenience) is the proof that I speak sincerely. As for the explanations themselves, I—Fosco—I who know Sir Percival much better than Miss Halcombe knows him, affirm to you, on my honour

and my word, that he will not come near this house, or attempt to communicate with this house, while his wife is living in it. His affairs are embarrassed. Offer him his freedom, by means of the absence of Lady Glyde. I promise you he will take his freedom, and go back to the Continent, at the earliest moment when he can get away. Is this clear to you as crystal? Yes, it is. Have you questions to address to me? Be it so; I am here to answer. Ask, Mr. Fairlie—oblige me by asking, to your heart's content.'

He had said so much already in spite of me; and he looked so dreadfully capable of saying a great deal more, also in spite of me, that I declined his amiable invitation, in pure self-defence.

'Many thanks,' I replied. 'I am sinking fast. In my state of health, I must take things for granted. Allow me to do so on this occasion. We quite understand each other. Yes. Much obliged, I am sure, for your kind interference. If I ever get better, and ever have a second opportunity of improving our acquaintance——'

He got up. I thought he was going. No. More talk; more time for the development of infectious influences—in *my* room, too; remember that, in *my* room!

'One moment, yet,' he said; 'one moment before I take my leave. I ask permission, at parting, to impress on you an urgent necessity. It is this, sir! You must not think of waiting till Miss Halcombe recovers, before you receive Lady Glyde. Miss Halcombe has the attendance of the doctor, of the housekeeper at Blackwater Park, and of an experienced nurse as well,—three persons for whose capacity and devotion I answer with my life. I tell you that. I tell you, also, that the anxiety and alarm of her sister's illness has already

affected the health and spirits of Lady Glyde, and has made her totally unfit to be of use in the sick-room. Her position with her husband grows more and more deplorable and dangerous, every day. If you leave her any longer at Blackwater Park, you do nothing whatever to hasten her sister's recovery, and, at the same time, you risk the public scandal, which you, and I, and all of us, are bound, in the sacred interests of the Family, to avoid. With all my soul, I advise you to remove the serious responsibility of delay from your own shoulders, by writing to Lady Glyde, to come here at once. Do your affectionate, your honourable, your inevitable duty; and, whatever happens in the future, no one can lay the blame on *you*. I speak from my large experience; I offer my friendly advice. Is it accepted—Yes, or No?'

I looked at him—merely looked at him—with my sense of his amazing assurance, and my dawning resolution to ring for Louis, and have him shown out of the room, expressed in every line of my face. It is perfectly incredible, but quite true, that my face did not appear to produce the slightest impression on him. Born without nerves—evidently, born without nerves.

'You hesitate?' he said. 'Mr. Fairlie! I understand that hesitation. You object—see, sir, how my sympathies look straight down into your thoughts!—you object that Lady Glyde is not in health and not in spirits to take the long journey, from Hampshire to this place, by herself. Her own maid is removed from her, as you know; and, of other servants fit to travel with her, from one end of England to another, there are none at Blackwater Park. You object, again, that she cannot comfortably stop and rest in London, on her way here, because she cannot comfortably go alone to a

public hotel where she is a total stranger. In one breath, I grant both objections—in another breath, I remove them. Follow me, if you please, for the last time. It was my intention, when I returned to England with Sir Percival, to settle myself in the neighbourhood of London. That purpose has just been happily accomplished. I have taken, for six months, a little furnished house, in the quarter called St. John's Wood. Be so obliging as to keep this fact in your mind; and observe the programme I now propose. Lady Glyde travels to London (a short journey)—I myself meet her at the station—I take her to rest and sleep at my house, which is also the house of her aunt—when she is restored, I escort her to the station again—she travels to this place, and her own maid (who is now under your roof) receives her at the carriage door. Here is comfort consulted; here are the interests of propriety consulted; here is your own duty—duty of hospitality, sympathy, protection, to an unhappy lady in need of all three—smoothed and made easy, from the beginning to the end. I cordially invite you, sir, to second my efforts in the sacred interests of the Family. I seriously advise you to write, by my hands, offering the hospitality of your house (and heart), and the hospitality of my house (and heart), to that injured and unfortunate lady whose cause I plead to-day.'

He waved his horrid hand at me; he struck his infectious breast; he addressed me oratorically—as if I was laid up in the House of Commons. It was high time to take a desperate course of some sort. It was also high time to send for Louis, and adopt the precaution of fumigating the room.

In this trying emergency, an idea occurred to me—an inestimable idea which, so to speak, killed two intru-

sive birds with one stone. I determined to get rid of the Count's tiresome eloquence, and of Lady Glyde's tiresome troubles, by complying with this odious foreigner's request, and writing the letter at once. There was not the least danger of the invitation being accepted, for there was not the least chance that Laura would consent to leave Blackwater Park, while Marian was lying there ill. How this charmingly convenient obstacle could have escaped the officious penetration of the Count, it was impossible to conceive—but it *had* escaped him. My dread that he might yet discover it, if I allowed him any more time to think, stimulated me to such an amazing degree, that I struggled into a sitting position; seized, really seized the writing materials by my side; and produced the letter as rapidly as if I had been a common clerk in an office. 'Dearest Laura, Please come, whenever you like. Break the journey by sleeping in London at your aunt's house. Grieved to hear of dear Marian's illness. Ever affectionately yours.' I handed these lines, at arm's length, to the Count—I sank back in my chair—I said, 'Excuse me; I am entirely prostrated; I can do no more. Will you rest and lunch down stairs? Love to all, and sympathy, and so on. *Good* morning.'

He made another speech—the man was absolutely inexhaustible. I closed my eyes; I endeavoured to hear as little as possible. In spite of my endeavours, I was obliged to hear a great deal. My sister's endless husband congratulated himself and congratulated me, on the result of our interview; he mentioned a great deal more about his sympathies and mine; he deplored my miserable health; he offered to write me a prescription; he impressed on me the necessity of not forgetting what he had said about the importance of light; he

accepted my obliging invitation to rest and lunch; he recommended me to expect Lady Glyde in two or three days' time; he begged my permission to look forward to our next meeting, instead of paining himself and paining me, by saying farewell; he added a great deal more, which, I rejoice to think, I did not attend to at the time, and do not remember now. I heard his sympathetic voice travelling away from me by degrees—but, large as he was, I never heard *him*. He had the negative merit of being absolutely noiseless. I don't know when he opened the door, or when he shut it. I ventured to make use of my eyes again, after an interval of silence—and he was gone.

I rang for Louis, and retired to my bath-room. Tepid water, strengthened with aromatic vinegar, for myself, and copious fumigation, for my study, were the obvious precautions to take; and of course I adopted them. I rejoice to say, they proved successful. I enjoyed my customary siesta. I awoke moist and cool.

My first inquiries were for the Count. Had we really got rid of him? Yes—he had gone away by the afternoon train. Had he lunched; and, if so, upon what? Entirely upon fruit-tart and cream. What a man! What a digestion!

Am I expected to say anything more? I believe not. I believe I have reached the limits assigned to me. The shocking circumstances which happened at a later period, did not, I am thankful to say, happen in my presence. I do beg and entreat that nobody will be so very unfeeling as to lay any part of the blame of those circumstances on *me*. I did everything for the best. I am not answerable for a deplorable calamity, which it was quite impossible to foresee. I am shattered by

it; I have suffered under it, as nobody else has suffered. My servant, Louis (who is really attached to me in his unintelligent way), thinks I shall never get over it. He sees me dictating at this moment, with my handkerchief to my eyes. I wish to mention, in justice to myself, that it was not my fault, and that I am quite exhausted and heartbroken. Need I say more?

The Story continued by ELIZA MICHELSON, *Housekeeper at Blackwater Park.*

I.

I am asked to state plainly what I know of the progress of Miss Halcombe's illness, and of the circumstances under which Lady Glyde left Blackwater Park for London.

The reason given for making this demand on me is, that my testimony is wanted in the interests of truth. As the widow of a clergyman of the Church of England (reduced by misfortune to the necessity of accepting a situation), I have been taught to place the claims of truth above all other considerations. I therefore comply with a request which I might otherwise, through reluctance to connect myself with distressing family affairs, have hesitated to grant.

I made no memorandum at the time, and I cannot therefore be sure to a day, of the date; but I believe I am correct in stating that Miss Halcombe's serious illness began during the last fortnight or ten days in June. The breakfast hour was late at Blackwater Park—sometimes as late as ten, never earlier than half-past nine. On the morning to which I am now referring, Miss Halcombe (who was usually the first to come down) did

not make her appearance at the table. After the family had waited a quarter of an hour, the upper housemaid was sent to see after her, and came running out of the room dreadfully frightened. I met the servant on the stairs, and went at once to Miss Halcombe to see what was the matter. The poor lady was incapable of telling me. She was walking about her room with a pen in hand, quite light-headed, in a state of burning fever.

Lady Glyde (being no longer in Sir Percival's service, I may, without impropriety, mention my former mistress by her name, instead of calling her My Lady) was the first to come in, from her own bedroom. She was so dreadfully alarmed and distressed, that she was quite useless. The Count Fosco, and his lady, who came up-stairs immediately afterwards, were both most serviceable and kind. Her ladyship assisted me to get Miss Halcombe to her bed. His lordship the Count, remained in the sitting-room, and, having sent for my medicine-chest, made a mixture for Miss Halcombe, and a cooling lotion to be applied to her head, so as to lose no time before the doctor came. We applied the lotion; but we could not get her to take the mixture. Sir Percival undertook to send for the doctor. He despatched a groom, on horseback, for the nearest medical man, Mr. Dawson, of Oak Lodge.

Mr. Dawson arrived in less than an hour's time. He was a respectable elderly man, well known, all round the country; and we were much alarmed when we found that he considered the case to be a very serious one.

His lordship the Count, affably entered into conversation with Mr. Dawson, and gave his opinions with a judicious freedom. Mr. Dawson, not over-courteously, inquired if his lordship's advice was the advice

of a doctor; and being informed that it was the advice of one who had studied medicine, unprofessionally, replied that he was not accustomed to consult with amateur-physicians. The Count, with truly Christian meekness of temper, smiled, and left the room. Before he went out, he told me that he might be found, in case he was wanted in the course of the day, at the boat-house on the banks of the lake. Why he should have gone there, I cannot say. But he did go; remaining away the whole day till seven o'clock, which was dinner-time. Perhaps, he wished to set the example of keeping the house as quiet as possible. It was entirely in his character to do so. He was a most considerate nobleman.

Miss Halcombe passed a very bad night; the fever coming and going, and getting worse towards the morning, instead of better. No nurse fit to wait on her being at hand in the neighbourhood, her ladyship the Countess, and myself, undertook the duty, relieving each other. Lady Glyde, most unwisely, insisted on sitting up with us. She was much too nervous and too delicate in health to bear the anxiety of Miss Halcombe's illness calmly. She only did herself harm, without being of the least real assistance. A more gentle and affectionate lady never lived; but she cried, and she was frightened—two weaknesses which made her entirely unfit to be present in a sick-room.

Sir Percival and the Count came in the morning to make their inquiries.

Sir Percival (from distress, I presume, at his lady's affliction, and at Miss Halcombe's illness) appeared much confused and unsettled in his mind. His lordship testified, on the contrary, a becoming composure and interest. He had his straw hat in one hand, and

his book in the other; and he mentioned to Sir Percival, in my hearing, that he would go out again and study at the lake. 'Let us keep the house quiet,' he said. 'Let us not smoke in-doors, my friend, now Miss Halcombe is ill. You go your way, and I will go mine. When I study, I like to be alone. Good morning, Mrs. Michelson.'

Sir Percival was not civil enough—perhaps, I ought, in justice to say, not composed enough—to take leave of me with the same polite attention. The only person in the house, indeed, who treated me, at that time or at any other, on the footing of a lady in distressed circumstances, was the Count. He had the manners of a true nobleman; he was considerate towards every one. Even the young person (Fanny by name) who attended on Lady Glyde, was not beneath his notice. When she was sent away by Sir Percival, his lordship (showing me his sweet little birds at the time) was most kindly anxious to know what had become of her, where she was to go the day she left Blackwater Park, and so on. It is in such little delicate attentions that the advantages of aristocratic birth always show themselves. I make no apology for introducing these particulars; they are brought forward in justice to his lordship, whose character, I have reason to know, is viewed rather harshly in certain quarters. A nobleman who can respect a lady in distressed circumstances, and can take a fatherly interest in the fortunes of an humble servant girl, shows principles and feelings of too high an order to be lightly called in question. I advance no opinions—I offer facts only. My endeavour through life is to judge not, that I be not judged. One of my beloved husband's finest sermons was on that text. I read it constantly—in my own copy of the edition printed by subscription, in the

first days of my widowhood—and, at every fresh perusal, I derive an increase of spiritual benefit and edification.

There was no improvement in Miss Halcombe; and the second night was even worse than the first. Mr. Dawson was constant in his attendance. The practical duties of nursing were still divided between the Countess and myself; Lady Glyde persisting in sitting up with us, though we both entreated her to take some rest. 'My place is by Marian's bedside,' was her only answer. 'Whether I am ill, or well, nothing will induce me to lose sight of her.'

Towards mid-day, I went down stairs to attend to some of my regular duties. An hour afterwards, on my way back to the sick-room, I saw the Count (who had gone out again early, for the third time), entering the hall, to all appearance in the highest good spirits. Sir Percival, at the same moment, put his head out of the library-door, and addressed his noble friend, with extreme eagerness, in these words:

'Have you found her?'

His lordship's large face became dimpled all over with placid smiles; but he made no reply in words. At the same time, Sir Percival turned his head, observed that I was approaching the stairs, and looked at me in the most rudely angry manner possible.

'Come in here and tell me about it,' he said, to the Count. 'Whenever there are women in a house, they're always sure to be going up or down stairs.'

'My dear Percival,' observed his lordship, kindly, 'Mrs. Michelson has duties. Pray recognise her admirable performance of them as sincerely as I do! How is the sufferer, Mrs. Michelson?'

'No better, my lord, I regret to say.'

'Sad—most sad!' remarked the Count. 'You look

fatigued, Mrs. Michelson. It is certainly time you and my wife had some help in nursing. I think I may be the means of offering you that help. Circumstances have happened which will oblige Madame Fosco to travel to London either to-morrow or the day after. She will go away in the morning, and return at night; and she will bring back with her, to relieve you, a nurse of excellent conduct and capacity, who is now disengaged. The woman is known to my wife as a person to be trusted. Before she comes here, say nothing about her, if you please, to the doctor, because he will look with an evil eye on any nurse of my providing. When she appears in this house, she will speak for herself; and Mr. Dawson will be obliged to acknowledge that there is no excuse for not employing her. Lady Glyde will say the same. Pray present my best respects and sympathies to Lady Glyde.'

I expressed my grateful acknowledgments for his lordship's kind consideration. Sir Percival cut them short by calling to his noble friend (using, I regret to say, a profane expression) to come into the library, and not to keep him waiting there any longer.

I proceeded upstairs. We are poor erring creatures; and however well established a woman's principles may be, she cannot always keep on her guard against the temptation to exercise an idle curiosity. I am ashamed to say that an idle curiosity, on this occasion, got the better of *my* principles, and made me unduly inquisitive about the question which Sir Percival had addressed to his noble friend, at the library-door. Who was the Count expected to find, in the course of his studious morning rambles at Blackwater Park? A woman, it was to be presumed, from the terms of Sir Percival's inquiry. I did not suspect the Count of any impro-

priety—I knew his moral character too well. The only question I asked myself was—Had he found her?

To resume. The night passed as usual, without producing any change for the better in Miss Halcombe. The next day she seemed to improve a little. The day after that, her ladyship the Countess, without mentioning the object of her journey to any one in my hearing, proceeded by the morning train to London; her noble husband, with his customary attention, accompanying her to the station.

I was now left in sole charge of Miss Halcombe, with every apparent chance, in consequence of her sister's resolution not to leave the bedside, of having Lady Glyde herself to nurse next.

The only circumstance of any importance that happened in the course of the day, was the occurrence of another unpleasant meeting between the doctor and the Count.

His lordship, on returning from the station, stepped up into Miss Halcombe's sitting-room to make his inquiries. I went out from the bedroom to speak to him; Mr. Dawson and Lady Glyde being both with the patient at the time. The Count asked me many questions about the treatment and the symptoms. I informed him that the treatment was of the kind described as 'saline;' and that the symptoms, between the attacks of fever, were certainly those of increasing weakness and exhaustion. Just as I was mentioning these last particulars, Mr. Dawson came out from the bedroom.

'Good morning, sir,' said his lordship, stepping forward in the most urbane manner, and stopping the doctor, with a high-bred resolution impossible to resist,

'I greatly fear you find no improvement in the symptoms to-day?'

'I find decided improvement,' answered Mr. Dawson.

'You still persist in your lowering treatment of this case of fever?' continued his lordship.

'I persist in the treatment which is justified by my own professional experience,' said Mr. Dawson.

'Permit me to put one question to you on the vast subject of professional experience,' observed the Count. 'I presume to offer no more advice—I only presume to make an inquiry. You live at some distance, sir, from the gigantic centres of scientific activity —London and Paris. Have you ever heard of the wasting effects of fever being reasonably and intelligibly repaired by fortifying the exhausted patient with brandy, wine, ammonia, and quinine? Has that new heresy of the highest medical authorities ever reached your ears—Yes, or No?'

'When a professional man puts that question to me, I shall be glad to answer him,' said the doctor, opening the door to go out. 'You are not a professional man; and I beg to decline answering *you*.'

Buffeted in this inexcusably uncivil way, on one cheek, the Count, like a practical Christian, immediately turned the other, and said, in the sweetest manner, 'Good morning, Mr. Dawson.'

If my late beloved husband had been so fortunate as to know his lordship, how highly he and the Count would have esteemed each other!

Her ladyship the Countess returned by the last train that night, and brought with her the nurse from London. I was instructed that this person's name was Mrs. Rubelle. Her personal appearance, and her

imperfect English, when she spoke, informed me that she was a foreigner.

I have always cultivated a feeling of humane indulgence for foreigners. They do not possess our blessings and advantages; and they are for the most part, brought up in the blind errors of popery. It has also always been my precept and practice, as it was my dear husband's precept and practice before me (see Sermon xxix, in the Collection by the late Rev. Samuel Michelson, M.A.), to do as I would be done by. On both these accounts, I will not say that Mrs. Rubelle struck me as being a small, wiry, sly person, of fifty or thereabouts, with a dark brown or Creole complexion, and watchful light gray eyes. Nor will I mention, for the reasons just alleged, that I thought her dress, though it was of the plainest black silk, inappropriately costly in texture and unnecessarily refined in trimming and finish, for a person in her position in life. I should not like these things to be said of me, and therefore it is my duty not to say them of Mrs. Rubelle. I will merely mention that her manners were—not perhaps unpleasantly reserved—but only remarkably quiet and retiring; that she looked about her a great deal, and said very little, which might have arisen quite as much from her own modesty, as from distrust of her position at Blackwater Park; and that she declined to partake of supper (which was curious, perhaps, but surely not suspicious?), although I myself politely invited her to that meal, in my own room.

At the Count's particular suggestion (so like his lordship's forgiving kindness!), it was arranged that Mrs. Rubelle should not enter on her duties, until she had been seen and approved by the doctor the next morn-

ing. I sat up that night. Lady Glyde appeared to be very unwilling that the new nurse should be employed to attend on Miss Halcombe. Such want of liberality towards a foreigner on the part of a lady of her education and refinement surprised me. I ventured to say, 'My lady, we must all remember not to be hasty in our judgments on our inferiors—especially when they come from foreign parts.' Lady Glyde did not appear to attend to me. She only sighed, and kissed Miss Halcombe's hand as it lay on the counterpane. Scarcely a judicious proceeding in a sick-room, with a patient whom it was highly desirable not to excite. But poor Lady Glyde knew nothing of nursing—nothing whatever, I am sorry to say.

The next morning, Mrs. Rubelle was sent to the sitting-room, to be approved by the doctor, on his way through to the bedroom.

I left Lady Glyde with Miss Halcombe, who was slumbering at the time, and joined Mrs. Rubelle, with the object of kindly preventing her from feeling strange and nervous in consequence of the uncertainty of her situation. She did not appear to see it in that light. She seemed to be quite satisfied, beforehand, that Mr. Dawson would approve of her; and she sat calmly looking out of window, with every appearance of enjoying the country air. Some people might have thought such conduct suggestive of brazen assurance. I beg to say that I more liberally set it down to extraordinary strength of mind.

Instead of the doctor coming up to us, I was sent for to see the doctor. I thought this change of affairs rather odd, but Mrs. Rubelle did not appear to be affected by it in any way. I left her still calmly looking out of the window, and still silently enjoying the country air.

Mr. Dawson was waiting for me, by himself, in the breakfast-room.

'About this new nurse, Mrs. Michelson,' said the doctor.

'Yes, sir?'

'I find that she has been brought here from London by the wife of that fat old foreigner, who is always trying to interfere with me. Mrs. Michelson, the fat old foreigner is a Quack.'

This was very rude. I was naturally shocked at it.

'Are you aware, sir,' I said, 'that you are talking of a nobleman?'

'Pooh! He isn't the first Quack with a handle to his name. They're all Counts—hang 'em!'

'He would not be a friend of Sir Percival Glyde's, sir, if he was not a member of the highest aristocracy—excepting the English aristocracy, of course.'

'Very well, Mrs. Michelson, call him what you like; and let us get back to the nurse. I have been objecting to her already.'

'Without having seen her, sir?'

'Yes; without having seen her. She may be the best nurse in existence; but she is not a nurse of my providing. I have put that objection to Sir Percival, as the master of the house. He doesn't support me. He says a nurse of my providing would have been a stranger from London also; and he thinks the woman ought to have a trial, after his wife's aunt has taken the trouble to fetch her from London. There is some justice in that; and I can't decently say No. But I have made it a condition that she is to go at once, if I find reason to complain of her. This proposal being one which I have some right to make, as medical attendant, Sir Percival has consented to it. Now, Mrs. Michelson, I

know I can depend on you; and I want you to keep a sharp eye on the nurse, for the first day or two, and to see that she gives Miss Halcombe no medicines but mine. This foreign nobleman of yours is dying to try his quack remedies (mesmerism included) on my patient; and a nurse who is brought here by his wife may be a little too willing to help him. You understand? Very well, then, we may go upstairs. Is the nurse there? I'll say a word to her, before she goes into the sickroom.'

We found Mrs. Rubelle still enjoying herself at the window. When I introduced her to Mr. Dawson, neither the doctor's doubtful looks nor the doctor's searching questions appeared to confuse her in the least. She answered him quietly in her broken English; and, though he tried hard to puzzle her, she never betrayed the least ignorance, so far, about any part of her duties. This was doubtless the result of strength of mind, as I said before, and not of brazen assurance, by any means.

We all went into the bedroom.

Mrs. Rubelle looked, very attentively, at the patient; curtseyed to Lady Glyde; set one or two little things right in the room; and sat down quietly in a corner to wait until she was wanted. Her ladyship seemed startled and annoyed by the appearance of the strange nurse. No one said anything, for fear of rousing Miss Halcombe, who was still slumbering—except the doctor, who whispered a question about the night. I softly answered, 'Much as usual;' and then Mr. Dawson went out. Lady Glyde followed him, I suppose to speak about Mrs. Rubelle. For my own part, I had made up my mind already that this quiet foreign person would keep her situation. She had all her wits about

her; and she certainly understood her business. So far, I could hardly have done much better by the bedside, myself.

Remembering Mr. Dawson's caution to me, I subjected Mrs. Rubelle to a severe scrutiny, at certain intervals, for the next three or four days. I over and over again entered the room softly and suddenly, but I never found her out in any suspicious action. Lady Glyde, who watched her as attentively as I did, discovered nothing either. I never detected a sign of the medicine bottles being tampered with; I never saw Mrs. Rubelle say a word to the Count, or the Count to her. She managed Miss Halcombe with unquestionable care and discretion. The poor lady wavered backwards and forwards between a sort of sleepy exhaustion which was half faintness and half slumbering, and attacks of fever which brought with them more or less of wandering in her mind. Mrs. Rubelle never disturbed her in the first case, and never startled her in the second, by appearing too suddenly at the bedside in the character of a stranger. Honour to whom honour is due (whether foreign or English)—and I give her privilege impartially to Mrs. Rubelle. She was remarkably uncommunicative about herself, and she was too quietly independent of all advice from experienced persons who understood the duties of a sick-room—but, with these drawbacks, she was a good nurse; and she never gave either Lady Glyde or Mr. Dawson the shadow of a reason for complaining of her.

The next circumstance of importance that occurred in the house was the temporary absence of the Count, occasioned by business which took him to London. He went away (I think) on the morning of the fourth day after the arrival of Mrs. Rubelle; and, at parting, he

spoke to Lady Glyde, very seriously, in my presence, on the subject of Miss Halcombe.

'Trust Mr. Dawson,' he said, 'for a few days more, if you please. But, if there is not some change for the better, in that time, send for advice from London, which this mule of a doctor must accept in spite of himself. Offend Mr. Dawson, and save Miss Halcombe. I say this seriously, on my word of honour and from the bottom of my heart.'

His lordship spoke with extreme feeling and kindness. But poor Lady Glyde's nerves were so completely broken down that she seemed quite frightened at him. She trembled from head to foot; and allowed him to take his leave, without uttering a word on her side. She turned to me, when he had gone, and said, 'Oh, Mrs. Michelson, I am heart-broken about my sister, and I have no friend to advise me! Do *you* think Mr. Dawson is wrong? He told me himself this morning, that there was no fear, and no need to send for another doctor.'

'With all respect to Mr. Dawson,' I answered, 'in your ladyship's place I should remember the Count's advice.'

Lady Glyde turned away from me suddenly, with an appearance of despair, for which I was quite unable to account.

'*His* advice!' she said to herself. 'God help us—*his* advice!'

The Count was away from Blackwater Park, as nearly as I remember, a week.

Sir Percival seemed to feel the loss of his lordship in various ways, and appeared also, I thought, much depressed and altered by the sickness and sorrow in

the house. Occasionally, he was so very restless, that I could not help noticing it; coming and going, and wandering here and there and everywhere in the grounds. His inquiries about Miss Halcombe, and about his lady (whose failing health seemed to cause him sincere anxiety) were most attentive. I think his heart was much softened. If some kind clerical friend —some such friend as he might have found in my late excellent husband—had been near him at this time, cheering moral progress might have been made with Sir Percival. I seldom find myself mistaken on a point of this sort; having had experience to guide me in my happy married days.

Her ladyship the Countess, who was now the only company for Sir Percival down stairs, rather neglected him, as I considered. Or, perhaps, it might have been that he neglected her. A stranger might almost have supposed that they were bent, now they were left together alone, on actually avoiding one another. This, of course, could not be. But it did so happen, nevertheless, that the Countess made her dinner at luncheon-time, and that she always came up-stairs towards evening, although Mrs. Rubelle had taken the nursing duties entirely off her hands. Sir Percival dined by himself; and William (the man out of livery) made the remark, in my hearing, that his master had put himself on half rations of food and on a double allowance of drink. I attach no importance to such an insolent observation as this, on the part of a servant. I reprobated it at the time, and I wish to be understood as reprobating it once more on this occasion.

In the course of the next few days, Miss Halcombe did certainly seem to all of us to be mending a little. Our faith in Mr. Dawson revived. He appeared to be

very confident about the case; and he assured Lady Glyde, when she spoke to him on the subject, that he would himself propose to send for a physician the moment he felt so much as the shadow of a doubt crossing his own mind.

The only person among us who did not appear to be relieved by these words, was the Countess. She said to me privately, that she could not feel easy about Miss Halcombe, on Mr. Dawson's authority, and that she should wait anxiously for her husband's opinion, on his return. That return, his letters informed her, would take place in three days' time. The Count and Countess corresponded regularly every morning, during his lordship's absence. They were, in that respect, as in all others, a pattern to married people.

On the evening of the third day, I noticed a change in Miss Halcombe, which caused me serious apprehension. Mrs. Rubelle noticed it too. We said nothing on the subject to Lady Glyde, who was then lying asleep, completely overpowered by exhaustion, on the sofa in the sitting-room.

Mr. Dawson did not pay his evening visit till later than usual. As soon as he set eyes on his patient, I saw his face alter. He tried to hide it; but he looked both confused and alarmed. A messenger was sent to his residence for his medicine-chest, disinfecting preparations were used in the room, and a bed was made up for him in the house by his own directions. 'Has the fever turned to infection?' I whispered to him. 'I am afraid it has,' he answered; 'we shall know better to-morrow morning.'

By Mr. Dawson's own directions Lady Glyde was kept in ignorance of this change for the worse. He himself absolutely forbade her, on account of her health,

to join us in the bedroom that night. She tried to resist—there was a sad scene—but he had his medical authority to support him; and he carried his point.

The next morning, one of the men-servants was sent to London, at eleven o'clock, with a letter to a physician in town, and with orders to bring the new doctor back with him by the earliest possible train. Half an hour after the messenger had gone, the Count returned to Blackwater Park.

The Countess, on her own responsibility, immediately brought him in to see the patient. There was no impropriety that I could discover in her taking this course. His lordship was a married man; he was old enough to be Miss Halcombe's father; and he saw her in the presence of a female relative, Lady Glyde's aunt. Mr. Dawson nevertheless protested against his presence in the room; but, I could plainly remark, the doctor was too much alarmed to make any serious resistance on this occasion.

The poor suffering lady was past knowing anyone about her. She seemed to take her friends for enemies. When the Count approached her bedside, her eyes, which had been wandering incessantly round and round the room before, settled on his face, with a dreadful stare of terror, which I shall remember to my dying day. The Count sat down by her; felt her pulse, and her temples; looked at her very attentively; and then turned round upon the doctor with such an expression of indignation and contempt in his face, that the words failed on Mr. Dawson's lips, and he stood, for a moment, pale with anger and alarm—pale and perfectly speechless.

His lordship looked next at me.

'When did the change happen?' he asked.

I told him the time.

'Has Lady Glyde been in the room since?'

I replied that she had not. The doctor had absolutely forbidden her to come into the room, on the evening before, and had repeated the order again in the morning.

'Have you and Mrs. Rubelle been made aware of the full extent of the mischief?'—was his next question.

We were aware, I answered, that the malady was considered infectious. He stopped me, before I could add anything more.

'It is Typhus Fever,' he said.

In the minute that passed, while these questions and answers were going on, Mr. Dawson recovered himself, and addressed the Count with his customary firmness.

'It is *not* typhus fever,' he remarked sharply. 'I protest against this intrusion, sir. No one has a right to put questions here, but me. I have done my duty to the best of my ability——'

The Count interrupted him—not by words, but only by pointing to the bed. Mr. Dawson seemed to feel that silent contradiction to his assertion of his own ability, and to grow only the more angry under it.

'I say I have done my duty," he reiterated. 'A physician has been sent for from London. I will consult on the nature of the fever with him, and with no one else. I insist on your leaving the room.'

'I entered this room, sir, in the sacred interests of humanity,' said the Count. 'And in the same interests, if the coming of the physician is delayed, I will enter it again. I warn you once more that the fever has turned to typhus, and that your treatment is responsible for this lamentable change. If that unhappy lady dies, I will give my testimony in a court of justice that your

ignorance and obstinacy have been the cause of her death.'

Before Mr. Dawson could answer, before the Count could leave us, the door was opened from the sitting-room, and we saw Lady Glyde on the threshold.

'I *must*, and *will* come in,' she said, with extraordinary firmness.

Instead of stopping her, the Count moved into the sitting-room, and made way for her to go in. On all other occasions, he was the last man in the world to forget anything; but, in the surprise of the moment, he apparently forgot the danger of infection from typhus, and the urgent necessity of forcing Lady Glyde to take proper care of herself.

To my astonishment, Mr. Dawson showed more presence of mind. He stopped her ladyship at the first step she took towards the bedside. 'I am sincerely sorry, I am sincerely grieved,' he said. 'The fever may, I fear, be infectious. Until I am certain that it is not, I entreat you to keep out of the room.'

She struggled for a moment; then suddenly dropped her arms, and sank forward. She had fainted. The Countess and I took her from the doctor, and carried her into her own room. The Count preceded us, and waited in the passage, till I came out, and told him that we had recovered her from the swoon.

I went back to the doctor to tell him, by Lady Glyde's desire, that she insisted on speaking to him immediately. He withdrew at once to quiet her ladyship's agitation, and to assure her of the physician's arrival in the course of a few hours. Those hours passed very slowly. Sir Percival and the Count were together down stairs, and sent up, from time to time, to make their inquiries. At last, between five

and six o'clock, to our great relief, the physician came.

He was a younger man than Mr. Dawson; very serious, and very decided. What he thought of the previous treatment, I cannot say; but it struck me as curious that he put many more questions to myself and to Mrs. Rubelle than he put to the doctor, and that he did not appear to listen with much interest to what Mr. Dawson said, while he was examining Mr. Dawson's patient. I began to suspect, from what I observed in this way, that the Count had been right about the illness all the way through; and I was naturally confirmed in that idea, when Mr. Dawson, after some little delay, asked the one important question which the London doctor had been sent for to set at rest.

'What is your opinion of the fever?' he inquired.

'Typhus,' replied the physician. 'Typhus fever beyond all doubt.'

That quiet foreign person, Mrs. Rubelle, crossed her thin, brown hands in front of her, and looked at me with a very significant smile. The Count himself could hardly have appeared more gratified, if he had been present in the room, and had heard the confirmation of his own opinion.

After giving us some useful directions about the management of the patient, and mentioning that he would come again in five days' time, the physician withdrew to consult in private with Mr. Dawson. He would offer no opinion on Miss Halcombe's chances of recovery: he said it was impossible at that stage of the illness to pronounce, one way or the other.

The five days passed anxiously.

Countess Fosco and myself took it by turns to relieve

Mrs. Rubelle; Miss Halcombe's condition growing worse and worse, and requiring our utmost care and attention. It was a terribly trying time. Lady Glyde (supported, as Mr. Dawson said, by the constant strain of her suspense on her sister's account) rallied in the most extraordinary manner, and showed a firmness and determination for which I should myself never have given her credit. She insisted on coming into the sick-room, two or three times every day, to look at Miss Halcombe with her own eyes; promising not to go too close to the bed, it the doctor would consent to her wishes, so far. Mr. Dawson very unwillingly made the concession required of him; I think he saw that it was hopeless to dispute with her. She came in every day; and she self-denyingly kept her promise. I felt it personally so distressing (as reminding me of my own affliction during my husband's last illness) to see how she suffered under these circumstances, that I must beg not to dwell on this part of the subject any longer. It is more agreeable to me to mention that no fresh disputes took place between Mr. Dawson and the Count. His lordship made all his inquiries by deputy; and remained continually in company with Sir Percival, down stairs.

On the fifth day, the physician came again, and gave us a little hope. He said the tenth day from the first appearance of the typhus would probably decide the result of the illness, and he arranged for his third visit to take place on that date. The interval passed as before—except that the Count went to London again, one morning, and returned at night.

On the tenth day it pleased a merciful Providence to relieve our household from all further anxiety and alarm. The physician positively assured us that Miss

Halcombe was out of danger. 'She wants no doctor, now—all she requires is careful watching and nursing, for some time to come; and that I see she has.' Those were his own words. That evening I read my husband's touching sermon on Recovery from Sickness, with more happiness and advantage (in a spiritual point of view) than I ever remember to have derived from it before.

The effect of the good news on poor Lady Glyde was, I grieve to say, quite overpowering. She was too weak to bear the violent reaction; and in another day or two, she sank into a state of debility and depression, which obliged her to keep her room. Rest and quiet, and change of air afterwards, were the best remedies which Mr. Dawson could suggest for her benefit. It was fortunate that matters were no worse, for, on the very day after she took to her room, the Count and the doctor had another disagreement; and this time, the dispute between them was of so serious a nature, that Mr. Dawson left the house.

I was not present at the time; but I understood that the subject of dispute was the amount of nourishment which it was necessary to give to assist Miss Halcombe's convalescence, after the exhaustion of the fever. Mr. Dawson, now that his patient was safe, was less inclined than ever to submit to unprofessional interference; and the Count (I cannot imagine why) lost all the self-control which he had so judiciously preserved on former occasions, and taunted the doctor, over and over again, with his mistake about the fever, when it changed to typhus. The unfortunate affair ended in Mr. Dawson's appealing to Sir Percival, and threatening (now that he could leave without absolute danger to Miss Halcombe) to withdraw from his attendance at Blackwater Park, if the Count's interference was not peremptorily sup-

pressed from that moment. Sir Percival's reply (though not designedly uncivil) had only resulted in making matters worse; and Mr. Dawson had thereupon withdrawn from the house, in a state of extreme indignation at Count Fosco's usage of him, and had sent in his bill the next morning.

We were now, therefore, left without the attendance of a medical man. Although there was no actual necessity for another doctor—nursing and watching being, as the physician had observed, all that Miss Halcombe required—I should still, if my authority had been consulted, have obtained professional assistance, from some other quarter, for form's sake.

The matter did not seem to strike Sir Percival in that light. He said it would be time enough to send for another doctor, if Miss Halcombe showed any signs of a relapse. In the mean while, we had the Count to consult in any minor difficulty; and we need not unnecessarily disturb our patient, in her present weak and nervous condition, by the presence of a stranger at her bedside. There was much that was reasonable, no doubt, in these considerations; but they left me a little anxious, nevertheless. Nor was I quite satisfied, in my own mind, of the propriety of our concealing the doctor's absence, as we did, from Lady Glyde. It was a merciful deception, I admit—for she was in no state to bear any fresh anxieties. But still it was a deception; and, as such, to a person of my principles, at best a doubtful proceeding.

A second perplexing circumstance which happened on the same day, and which took me completely by surprise, added greatly to the sense of uneasiness that was now weighing on my mind.

I was sent for to see Sir Percival in the library. The Count, who was with him when I went in, immediately rose and left us alone together. Sir Percival civilly asked me to take a seat; and then, to my great astonishment, addressed me in these terms:

'I want to speak to you, Mrs. Michelson, about a matter which I decided on some time ago, and which I should have mentioned before, but for the sickness and trouble in the house. In plain words, I have reasons for wishing to break up my establishment immediately at this place—leaving you in charge, of course, as usual. As soon as Lady Glyde and Miss Halcombe can travel, they must both have change of air. My friends, Count Fosco and the Countess, will leave us, before that time, to live in the neighbourhood of London. And I have reasons for not opening the house to any more company, with a view to economising as carefully as I can. I don't blame you—but my expenses here are a great deal too heavy. In short, I shall sell the horses, and get rid of all the servants, at once. I never do things by halves, as you know; and I mean to have the house clear of a pack of useless people by this time to-morrow.'

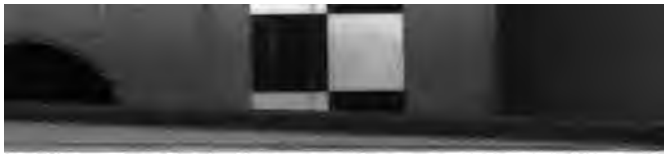
I listened to him, perfectly aghast with astonishment.

'Do you mean, Sir Percival, that I am to dismiss the indoor servants, under my charge, without the usual month's warning?' I asked.

'Certainly, I do. We may all be out of the house before another month; and I am not going to leave the servants here in idleness, with no master to wait on.'

'Who is to do the cooking, Sir Percival, while you are still staying here?'

'Margaret Porcher can roast and boil—keep her. What do I want with a cook, if I don't mean to give any dinner-parties?'



'The servant you have mentioned is the most unintelligent servant in the house, Sir Percival——'

'Keep her, I tell you; and have a woman in from the village to do the cleaning, and go away again. My weekly expenses must and shall be lowered immediately. I don't send for you to make objections, Mrs. Michelson—I send for you to carry out my plans of economy. Dismiss the whole lazy pack of in-door servants to-morrow, except Porcher. She is as strong as a horse—and we'll make her work like a horse.'

'You will excuse me for reminding you, Sir Percival, that if the servants go to-morrow, they must have a month's wages in lieu of a month's warning.'

'Let them! A month's wages saves a month's waste and gluttony in the servants-hall.'

This last remark conveyed an aspersion of the most offensive kind on my management. I had too much self-respect to defend myself under so gross an imputation. Christian consideration for the helpless position of Miss Halcombe and Lady Glyde, and for the serious inconvenience which my sudden absence might inflict on them, alone prevented me from resigning my situation on the spot. I rose immediately. It would have lowered me in my own estimation to have permitted the interview to continue a moment longer.

'After that last remark, Sir Percival, I have nothing more to say. Your directions shall be attended to.' Pronouncing those words, I bowed my head with the most distant respect, and went out of the room.'

The next day, the servants left in a body. Sir Percival himself dismissed the grooms and stablemen; sending them, with all the horses but one, to London. Of the whole domestic establishment, in-doors and out, there now remained only myself, Margaret Porcher,

and the gardener; this last living in his own cottage, and being wanted to take care of the one horse that remained in the stables.

With the house left in this strange and lonely condition; with the mistress of it ill in her room; with Miss Halcombe still as helpless as a child; and with the doctor's attendance withdrawn from us in enmity—it was surely not unnatural that my spirits should sink, and my customary composure be very hard to maintain. My mind was ill at ease. I wished the poor ladies both well again; and I wished myself away from Blackwater Park.

II.

The next event that occurred was of so singular a nature, that it might have caused me a feeling of superstitious surprise, if my mind had not been fortified by principle against any pagan weakness of that sort. The uneasy sense of something wrong in the family which had made me wish myself away from Blackwater Park, was actually followed, strange to say, by my departure from the house. It is true that my absence was for a temporary period only: but the coincidence was, in my opinion, not the less remarkable on that account.

My departure took place under the following circumstances:

A day or two after the servants all left, I was again sent for to see Sir Percival. The undeserved slur which he had cast on my management of the household, did not, I am happy to say, prevent me from returning good for evil to the best of my ability, by complying with his request as readily and respectfully as ever. It cost me a struggle with that fallen nature which we all share in

common, before I could suppress my feelings. Being accustomed to self-discipline, I accomplished the sacrifice.

I found Sir Percival and Count Fosco sitting together, again. On this occasion his lordship remained present at the interview, and assisted in the development of Sir Percival's views.

The subject to which they now requested my attention, related to the healthy change of air by which we all hoped that Miss Halcombe and Lady Glyde might soon be enabled to profit. Sir Percival mentioned that both the ladies would probably pass the autumn (by invitation of Frederick Fairlie, Esquire) at Limmeridge House, Cumberland. But before they went there, it was his opinion, confirmed by Count Fosco (who here took up the conversation and continued it to the end), that they would benefit by a short residence first in the genial climate of Torquay. The great object, therefore, was to engage lodgings at that place, affording all the comforts and advantages of which they stood in need; and the great difficulty was to find an experienced person capable of choosing the sort of residence which they wanted. In this emergency, the Count begged to inquire, on Sir Percival's behalf, whether I would object to give the ladies the benefit of my assistance, by proceeding myself to Torquay in their interests.

It was impossible for a person in my situation, to meet any proposal, made in these terms, with a positive objection.

I could only venture to represent the serious inconvenience of my leaving Blackwater Park, in the extraordinary absence of all the in-door servants with the one exception of Margaret Porcher. But Sir Percival and his lordship declared that they were both willing to put up with inconvenience for the sake of the invalids.

I next respectfully suggested writing to an agent at Torquay; but I was met here by being reminded of the imprudence of taking lodgings without first seeing them. I was also informed that the Countess (who would otherwise have gone to Devonshire herself) could not, in Lady Glyde's present condition, leave her niece; and that Sir Percival and the Count had business to transact together, which would oblige them to remain at Blackwater Park. In short, it was clearly shown me, that if I did not undertake the errand, no one else could be trusted with it. Under these circumstances, I could only inform Sir Percival that my services were at the disposal of Miss Halcombe and Lady Glyde.

It was thereupon arranged that I should leave the next morning; that I should occupy one or two days in examining all the most convenient houses in Torquay; and that I should return, with my report, as soon as I conveniently could. A memorandum was written for me by his lordship, stating the requisites which the place I was sent to take must be found to possess; and a note of the pecuniary limit assigned to me, was added by Sir Percival.

My own idea, on reading over these instructions, was, that no such residence as I saw described could be found at any watering-place in England; and that, even if it could by chance be discovered, it would certainly not be parted with for any period, on such terms as I was permitted to offer. I hinted at these difficulties to both the gentlemen; but Sir Percival (who undertook to answer me) did not appear to feel them. It was not for me to dispute the question. I said no more; but I felt a very strong conviction that the business on which I was sent away was so beset by difficulties that my errand was almost hopeless at starting.

Before I left, I took care to satisfy myself that Miss Halcombe was going on favourably.

There was a painful expression of anxiety in her face, which made me fear that her mind, on first recovering itself, was not at ease. But she was certainly strengthening more rapidly than I could have ventured to anticipate; and she was able to send kind messages to Lady Glyde, saying that she was fast getting well, and entreating her ladyship not to exert herself again too soon. I left her in charge of Mrs. Rubelle, who was still as quietly independent of every one else in the house as ever. When I knocked at Lady Glyde's door, before going away, I was told that she was still sadly weak and depressed; my informant being the Countess, who was then keeping her company in her room. Sir Percival and the Count were walking on the road to the lodge, as I was driven by in the chaise. I bowed to them, and quitted the house, with not a living soul left in the servants' offices but Margaret Porcher.

Every one must feel, what I have felt myself since that time, that these circumstances were more than unusual—they were almost suspicious. Let me, however, say again, that it was impossible for me, in my dependent position, to act otherwise than I did.

The result of my errand at Torquay was exactly what I had foreseen. No such lodgings as I was instructed to take could be found in the whole place; and the terms I was permitted to give were much too low for the purpose, even if I had been able to discover what I wanted. I accordingly returned to Blackwater Park; and informed Sir Percival, who met me at the door, that my journey had been taken in vain. He seemed too much occupied with some other subject to care about the failure of my errand, and his first words

informed me that even in the short time of my absence, another remarkable change had taken place in the house.

The Count and Countess Fosco had left Blackwater Park for their new residence in St. John's Wood.

I was not made aware of the motive for this sudden departure—I was only told that the Count had been very particular in leaving his kind compliments to me. When I ventured on asking Sir Percival whether Lady Glyde had any one to attend to her comforts in the absence of the Countess, he replied that she had Margaret Porcher to wait on her; and he added that a woman from the village had been sent for to do the work down stairs.

The answer really shocked me—there was such a glaring impropriety in permitting an under-housemaid to fill the place of confidential attendant on Lady Glyde. I went up-stairs at once, and met Margaret on the bedroom-landing. Her services had not been required (naturally enough); her mistress having sufficiently recovered, that morning, to be able to leave her bed. I asked, next, after Miss Halcombe; but I was answered in a slouching, sulky way, which left me no wiser than I was before. I did not choose to repeat the question, and perhaps provoke an impertinent reply. It was in every respect more becoming, to a person in my position, to present myself immediately in Lady Glyde's room.

I found that her ladyship had certainly gained in health during the last few days. Although still sadly weak and nervous, she was able to get up without assistance, and to walk slowly about her room, feeling no worse effect from the exertion than a slight sensation of fatigue. She had been made a little anxious that morn-

ing about Miss Halcombe, through having received no news of her from any one. I thought this seemed to imply a blamable want of attention on the part of Mrs. Rubelle; but I said nothing, and remained with Lady Glyde, to assist her to dress. When she was ready, we both left the room together to go to Miss Halcombe.

We were stopped in the passage by the appearance of Sir Percival. He looked as if he had been purposely waiting there to see us.

'Where are you going?' he said to Lady Glyde.

'To Marian's room,' she answered.

'It may spare you a disappointment,' remarked Sir Percival, 'if I tell you at once that you will not find her there.'

'Not find her there!'

'No. She left the house yesterday morning with Fosco and his wife.'

Lady Glyde was not strong enough to bear the surprise of this extraordinary statement. She turned fearfully pale; and leaned back against the wall, looking at her husband in dead silence.

I was so astonished myself, that I hardly knew what to say. I asked Sir Percival if he really meant that Miss Halcombe had left Blackwater Park.

'I certainly mean it,' he answered.

'In her state, Sir Percival! Without mentioning her intentions to Lady Glyde!'

Before he could reply, her ladyship recovered herself a little, and spoke.

'Impossible!' she cried out, in a loud, frightened manner; taking a step or two forward from the wall. 'Where was the doctor? where was Mr. Dawson when Marian went away?'

'Mr. Dawson wasn't wanted, and wasn't here,' said

Sir Percival. 'He left of his own accord, which is enough of itself to show that she was strong enough to travel. How you stare! If you don't believe she has gone, look for yourself. Open her room door, and all the other room doors, if you like.'

She took him at his word, and I followed her. There was no one in Miss Halcombe's room but Margaret Porcher, who was busy setting it to rights. There was no one in the spare rooms, or the dressing-rooms, when we looked into them afterwards. Sir Percival still waited for us in the passage. As we were leaving the last room that we had examined, Lady Glyde whispered, 'Don't go, Mrs. Michelson! don't leave me, for God's sake!' Before I could say anything in return, she was out again in the passage, speaking to her husband.

'What does it mean, Sir Percival? I insist—I beg and pray you will tell me what it means!'

'It means,' he answered, 'that Miss Halcombe was strong enough yesterday morning to sit up, and be dressed; and that she insisted on taking advantage of Fosco's going to London, to go there too.'

'To London!'

'Yes—on her way to Limmeridge.'

Lady Glyde turned, and appealed to me.

'You saw Miss Halcombe last,' she said. 'Tell me plainly, Mrs. Michelson, did you think she looked fit to travel?'

'Not in *my* opinion, your ladyship.'

Sir Percival, on his side, instantly turned, and appealed to me also.

'Before you went away,' he said, 'did you, or did you not, tell the nurse that Miss Halcombe looked much stronger and better?'

'I certainly made the remark, Sir Percival.'

He addressed her ladyship again, the moment I offered that reply.

'Set one of Mrs. Michelson's opinions fairly against the other,' he said, 'and try to be reasonable about a perfectly plain matter. If she had not been well enough to be moved, do you think we should any of us have risked letting her go? She has got three competent people to look after her—Fosco and your aunt, and Mrs. Rubelle, who went away with them expressly for that purpose. They took a whole carriage yesterday, and made a bed for her on the seat, in case she felt tired. To-day, Fosco and Mrs. Rubelle go on with her themselves to Cumberland——'

'Why does Marian go to Limmeridge, and leave me here by myself?' said her ladyship, interrupting Sir Percival.

'Because your uncle won't receive you till he has seen your sister first,' he replied. 'Have you forgotten the letter he wrote to her, at the beginning of her illness? It was shown to you; you read it yourself; and you ought to remember it.'

'I do remember it.'

'If you do, why should you be surprised at her leaving you? You want to be back at Limmeridge; and she has gone there to get your uncle's leave for you, on his own terms.'

Poor Lady Glyde's eyes filled with tears.

'Marian never left me before,' she said, 'without bidding me good-by.'

'She would have bid you good-by this time,' returned Sir Percival, 'if she had not been afraid of herself and of you. She knew you would try to stop her; she knew you would distress her by crying. Do you want to make any more objections? If you do, you must

come down stairs and ask questions in the dining-room. These worries upset me. I want a glass of wine.'

He left us suddenly.

His manner all through this strange conversation had been very unlike what it usually was. He seemed to be almost as nervous and fluttered, every now and then, as his lady herself. I should never have supposed that his health had been so delicate, or his composure so easy to upset.

I tried to prevail on Lady Glyde to go back to her room; but it was useless. She stopped in the passage, with the look of a woman whose mind was panic-stricken:

'Something has happened to my sister!' she said.

'Remember, my lady, what surprising energy there is in Miss Halcombe,' I suggested. 'She might well make an effort which other ladies, in her situation, would be unfit for. I hope and believe there is nothing wrong—I do indeed.'

'I must follow Marian!' said her ladyship, with the same panic-stricken look. 'I must go where she has gone; I must see that she is alive and well with my own eyes. Come! come down with me to Sir Percival.'

I hesitated; fearing that my presence might be considered an intrusion. I attempted to represent this to her ladyship; but she was deaf to me. She held my arm fast enough to force me to go down stairs with her; and she still clung to me with all the little strength she had, at the moment when I opened the dining-room door.

Sir Percival was sitting at the table with a decanter of wine before him. He raised the glass to his lips, as we went in, and drained it at a draught. Seeing that he looked at me angrily when he put it down again, I

attempted to make some apology for my accidental presence in the room.

'Do you suppose there are any secrets going on here?' he broke out, suddenly; 'there are none—there is nothing underhand; nothing kept from you or from any one.' After speaking those strange words, loudly and sternly, he filled himself another glass of wine, and asked Lady Glyde what she wanted of him.

'If my sister is fit to travel, I am fit to travel,' said her ladyship, with more firmness than she had yet shown. 'I come to beg you will make allowances for my anxiety about Marian, and let me follow her at once, by the afternoon train.'

'You must wait till to-morrow,' replied Sir Percival; 'and then, if you don't hear to the contrary, you can go. I don't suppose you are at all likely to hear to the contrary—so I shall write to Fosco by to-night's post.'

He said those last words, holding his glass up to the light, and looking at the wine in it, instead of at Lady Glyde. Indeed, he never once looked at her throughout the conversation. Such a singular want of good breeding in a gentleman of his rank, impressed me, I own, very painfully.

'Why should you write to Count Fosco?' she asked, in extreme surprise.

'To tell him to expect you by the mid-day train,' said Sir Percival. 'He will meet you at the station, when you get to London, and take you on to sleep at your aunt's, in St. John's Wood.'

Lady Glyde's hand began to tremble violently round my arm—why I could not imagine.

'There is no necessity for Count Fosco to meet me,' she said. 'I would rather not stay in London to sleep.'

'You must. You can't take the whole journey to

Cumberland in one day. You must rest a night in London—and I don't choose you to go by yourself to an hotel. Fosco made the offer to your uncle to give you house-room on the way down; and your uncle has accepted it. Here! here is a letter from him, addressed to yourself. I ought to have sent it up this morning; but I forgot. Read it, and see what Mr. Fairlie himself says to you.'

Lady Glyde looked at the letter for a moment; and then placed it in my hands.

'Read it,' she said, faintly. 'I don't know what is the matter with me. I can't read it, myself.'

It was a note of only four lines—so short and so careless, that it quite struck me. If I remember correctly, it contained no more than these words:

'Dearest Laura, Please come, whenever you like. Break the journey by sleeping at your aunt's house. Grieved to hear of dear Marian's illness. Affectionately yours, Frederick Fairlie.'

'I would rather not go there—I would rather not stay a night in London,' said her ladyship, breaking out eagerly with those words, before I had quite done reading the note, short as it was. 'Don't write to Count Fosco! Pray, pray don't write to him!'

Sir Percival filled another glass from the decanter, so awkwardly that he upset it, and spilt all the wine over the table. 'My sight seems to be failing me,' he muttered to himself, in an odd, muffled voice. He slowly set the glass up again, refilled it, and drained it once more at a draught. I began to fear, from his look and manner, that the wine was getting into his head.

'Pray don't write to Count Fosco!' persisted Lady Glyde, more earnestly than ever.

'Why not, I should like to know?' cried Sir Percival,

with a sudden burst of anger that startled us both. 'Where can you stay more properly in London than at the place your uncle himself chooses for you—at your aunt's house? Ask Mrs. Michelson.'

The arrangement proposed was so unquestionably the right and the proper one, that I could make no possible objection to it. Much as I sympathized with Lady Glyde in other respects, I could not sympathize with her in her unjust prejudices against Count Fosco. I never before met with any lady, of her rank and station, who was so lamentably narrow-minded on the subject of foreigners. Neither her uncle's note, nor Sir Percival's increasing impatience, seemed to have the least effect on her. She still objected to staying a night in London; she still implored her husband not to write to the Count.

'Drop it!' said Sir Percival, rudely turning his back on us. 'If you haven't sense enough to know what is best for yourself, other people must know for you. The arrangement is made; and there is an end of it. You are only wanted to do what Miss Halcombe has done before you——'

'Marian?' repeated her ladyship, in a bewildered manner; 'Marian sleeping in Count Fosco's house!'

'Yes, in Count Fosco's house. She slept there, last night, to break the journey. And you are to follow her example, and do what your uncle tells you. You are to sleep at Fosco's to-morrow night, as your sister did, to break the journey. Don't throw too many obstacles in my way! don't make me repent of letting you go at all!'

He started to his feet; and suddenly walked out into the verandah, through the open glass doors.

'Will your ladyship excuse me,' I whispered, 'if I suggest that we had better not wait here till Sir Percival

comes back? I am very much afraid he is over-excited with wine.'

She consented to leave the room, in a weary, absent manner.

As soon as we were safe up-stairs again, I did all I could to compose her ladyship's spirits. I reminded her that Mr. Fairlie's letters to Miss Halcombe and to herself did certainly sanction, and even render necessary, sooner or later, the course that had been taken. She agreed to this, and even admitted, of her own accord, that both letters were strictly in character with her uncle's peculiar disposition—but her fears about Miss Halcombe, and her unaccountable dread of sleeping at the Count's house in London, still remained unshaken in spite of every consideration that I could urge. I thought it my duty to protest against Lady Glyde's unfavourable opinion of his lordship, and I did so, with becoming forbearance and respect.

'Your ladyship will pardon my freedom,' I remarked, in conclusion, 'but it is said, "by their fruits ye shall know them." I am sure the Count's constant kindness and constant attention from the very beginning of Miss Halcombe's illness, merit our best confidence and esteem. Even his lordship's serious misunderstanding with Mr. Dawson was entirely attributable to his anxiety on Miss Halcombe's account.'

'What misunderstanding?' inquired her ladyship, with a look of sudden interest.

I related the unhappy circumstances under which Mr. Dawson had withdrawn his attendance—mentioning them all the more readily, because I disapproved of Sir Percival's continuing to conceal what had happened (as he had done in my presence) from the knowledge of Lady Glyde.

Her ladyship started up, with every appearance of being additionally agitated and alarmed by what I had told her.

'Worse! worse than I thought!' she said, walking about the room, in a bewildered manner. 'The Count knew Mr. Dawson would never consent to Marian's taking a journey—he purposely insulted the doctor to get him out of the house.'

'Oh, my lady! my lady!' I remonstrated.

'Mrs. Michelson!' she went on, vehemently; 'no words that ever were spoken will persuade me that my sister is in that man's power and in that man's house, with her own consent. My horror of him is such, that nothing Sir Percival could say, and no letters my uncle could write, would induce me, if I had only my own feelings to consult, to eat, drink, or sleep under his roof. But my misery of suspense about Marian gives me the courage to follow her anywhere—to follow her even into Count Fosco's house.'

I thought it right, at this point, to mention that Miss Halcombe had already gone on to Cumberland, according to Sir Percival's account of the matter.

'I am afraid to believe it!' answered her ladyship. 'I am afraid she is still in that man's house. If I am wrong—if she has really gone on to Limmeridge—I am resolved I will not sleep to-morrow night under Count Fosco's roof. My dearest friend in the world, next to my sister, lives near London. You have heard me, you have heard Miss Halcombe, speak of Mrs. Vesey? I mean to write, and propose to sleep at her house. I don't know how I shall get there—I don't know how I shall avoid the Count—but to that refuge I will escape in some way, if my sister has gone to Cumberland. All I ask of you to do, is to see yourself that my letter to Mrs.

Vesey goes to London to-night, as certainly as Sir Percival's letter goes to Count Fosco. I have reasons for not trusting the post-bag down stairs. Will you keep my secret, and help me in this? it is the last favour, perhaps, that I shall ever ask of you.'

I hesitated—I thought it all very strange—I almost feared that her ladyship's mind had been a little affected by recent anxiety and suffering. At my own risk, however, I ended by giving my consent. If the letter had been addressed to a stranger, or to anyone but a lady so well known to me by report as Mrs. Vesey, I might have refused. I thank God—looking to what happened afterwards—I thank God I never thwarted that wish, or any other, which Lady Glyde expressed to me, on the last day of her residence at Blackwater Park.

The letter was written, and given into my hands. I myself put it into the post-box in the village, that evening.

We saw nothing more of Sir Percival for the rest of the day.

I slept, by Lady Glyde's own desire, in the next room to hers, with the door open between us. There was something so strange and dreadful in the loneliness and emptiness of the house, that I was glad, on my side, to have a companion near me. Her ladyship sat up late, reading letters and burning them, and emptying her drawers and cabinets of little things she prized, as if she never expected to return to Blackwater Park. Her sleep was sadly disturbed when she at last went to bed; she cried out in it, several times—once, so loud that she woke herself. Whatever her dreams were, she did not think fit to communicate them to me. Perhaps, in my situation, I had no right to expect

that she should do so. It matters little, now. I was sorry for her—I was indeed heartily sorry for her all the same.

The next day was fine and sunny. Sir Percival came up, after breakfast, to tell us that the chaise would be at the door at a quarter to twelve; the train to London stopping at our station, at twenty minutes after. He informed Lady Glyde that he was obliged to go out, but added that he hoped to be back before she left. If any unforeseen accident delayed him, I was to accompany her to the station, and to take special care that she was in time for the train. Sir Percival communicated these directions very hastily; walking here and there about the room all the time. Her ladyship looked attentively after him, wherever he went. He never once looked at her in return.

She only spoke when he had done; and then she stopped him as he approached the door, by holding out her hand.

'I shall see you no more,' she said, in a very marked manner. 'This is our parting—our parting, it may be for ever. Will you try to forgive me, Percival, as heartily as I forgive *you?*'

His face turned of an awful whiteness all over; and great beads of perspiration broke out on his bald forehead. 'I shall come back,' he said—and made for the door, as hastily as if his wife's farewell words had frightened him out of the room.

I had never liked Sir Percival—but the manner in which he left Lady Glyde made me feel ashamed of having eaten his bread and lived in his service. I thought of saying a few comforting and Christian words to the poor lady; but there was something in her face, as she looked after her husband when the

door closed on him, that made me alter my mind and keep silence.

At the time named, the chaise drew up at the gates. Her ladyship was right—Sir Percival never came back. I waited for him till the last moment—and waited in vain.

No positive responsibility lay on my shoulders; and yet, I did not feel easy in my mind. 'It is of your own free will,' I said, as the chaise drove through the lodge-gates, 'that your ladyship goes to London?'

'I will go anywhere,' she answered, 'to end the dreadful suspense that I am suffering at this moment.'

She had made me feel almost as anxious and as uncertain about Miss Halcombe as she felt herself. I presumed to ask her to write me a line, if all went well in London. She answered, 'Most willingly, Mrs. Michelson.' 'We all have our crosses to bear, my lady,' I said, seeing her silent and thoughtful, after she had promised to write. She made no reply; she seemed to be too much wrapped up in her own thoughts to attend to me. 'I fear your ladyship rested badly last night,' I remarked after waiting a little. 'Yes,' she said; 'I was terribly disturbed by dreams.' 'Indeed, my lady?' I thought she was going to tell me her dreams; but no, when she spoke next it was only to ask a question. 'You posted the letter to Mrs. Vesey with your own hands?' 'Yes, my lady.'

'Did Sir Percival say, yesterday, that Count Fosco was to meet me at the terminus in London?' 'He did, my lady.'

She sighed heavily when I answered that last question, and said no more.

We arrived at the station, with hardly two minutes to spare. The gardener (who had driven us) managed about the luggage, while I took the ticket. The whistle of the train was sounding when I joined her ladyship on

the platform. She looked very strangely, and pressed her hand over her heart, as if some sudden pain or fright had overcome her at that moment.

'I wish you were going with me!' she said, catching eagerly at my arm, when I gave her the ticket.

If there had been time; if I had felt the day before, as I felt then, I would have made my arrangements to accompany her—even though the doing so had obliged me to give Sir Percival warning on the spot. As it was, her wishes expressed at the last moment only, were expressed too late for me to comply with them. She seemed to understand this herself before I could explain it, and did not repeat her desire to have me for a travelling companion. The train drew up at the platform. She gave the gardener a present for his children, and took my hand in her simple, hearty manner, before she got into the carriage.

'You have been very kind to me and to my sister,' she said—'kind when we were both friendless. I shall remember you gratefully, as long as I live to remember any one. Good-by—and God bless you!'

She spoke those words with a tone and a look which brought the tears into my eyes—she spoke them as if she was bidding me farewell for ever.

'Good-by, my lady,' I said, putting her into the carriage, and trying to cheer her; 'good-by, for the present only; good-by, with my best and kindest wishes for happier times!'

She shook her head, and shuddered as she settled herself in the carriage. The guard closed the door. 'Do you believe in dreams?' she whispered to me, at the window. '*My* dreams, last night, were dreams I have never had before. The terror of them is hanging over me still.' The whistle sounded before I could

answer, and the train moved. Her pale quiet face looked at me, for the last time; looked sorrowfully and solemnly from the window. She waved her hand—and I saw her no more.

Towards five o'clock on the afternoon of that same day, having a little time to myself in the midst of the household duties which now pressed upon me, I sat down alone in my own room, to try and compose my mind with the volume of my husband's Sermons. For the first time in my life, I found my attention wandering over those pious and cheering words. Concluding that Lady Glyde's departure must have disturbed me far more seriously than I had myself supposed, I put the book aside, and went out to take a turn in the garden. Sir Percival had not yet returned, to my knowledge, so I could feel no hesitation about showing myself in the grounds.

On turning the corner of the house, and gaining a view of the garden, I was startled by seeing a stranger walking in it. The stranger was a woman—she was lounging along the path, with her back to me, and was gathering the flowers.

As I approached, she heard me, and turned round.

My blood curdled in my veins. The strange woman in the garden was Mrs. Rubelle!

I could neither move, nor speak. She came up to me, as composedly as ever, with her flowers in her hand.

'What is the matter, ma'am?' she said, quietly.

'*You* here!' I gasped out. 'Not gone to London! Not gone to Cumberland!'

Mrs. Rubelle smelt at her flowers with a smile of malicious pity.

'Certainly not,' she said. 'I have never left Blackwater Park.'

I summoned breath enough and courage enough for another question.

'Where is Miss Halcombe?'

Mrs. Rubelle fairly laughed at me, this time; and replied in these words:

'Miss Halcombe, ma'am, has not left Blackwater Park, either.'

When I heard that astounding answer, all my thoughts were startled back on the instant to my parting with Lady Glyde. I can hardly say I reproached myself—but, at that moment, I think I would have given many a year's hard savings to have known four hours earlier what I knew now.

Mrs. Rubelle waited, quietly arranging her nosegay, as if she expected me to say something.

I could say nothing. I thought of Lady Glyde's worn-out energies and weakly health; and I trembled for the time when the shock of the discovery that I had made would fall on her. For a minute, or more, my fears for the poor ladies silenced me. At the end of that time, Mrs. Rubelle looked up sideways from her flowers, and said, 'Here is Sir Percival, ma'am, returned from his ride.'

I saw him as soon as she did. He came towards us, slashing viciously at the flowers with his riding-whip. When he was near enough to see my face, he stopped, struck at his boot with the whip, and burst out laughing, so harshly and so violently, that the birds flew away, startled, from the tree by which he stood.

'Well, Mrs. Michelson,' he said; 'you have found it out at last—have you?'

I made no reply. He turned to Mrs. Rubelle.

'When did you show yourself in the garden?'

'I showed myself about half an hour ago, sir. You said I might take my liberty, again, as soon as Lady Glyde had gone away to London.'

'Quite right. I don't blame you—I only asked the question.' He waited a moment, and then addressed himself once more to me. 'You can't believe it, can you?' he said, mockingly. 'Here! come along and see for yourself.'

He led the way round to the front of the house. I followed him; and Mrs. Rubelle followed me. After passing through the iron gates, he stopped, and pointed with his whip to the disused middle wing of the building.

'There!' he said. 'Look up at the first floor. You know the old Elizabethan bedrooms? Miss Halcombe is snug and safe in one of the best of them, at this moment. Take her in, Mrs. Rubelle (you have got your key?); take Mrs. Michelson in, and let her own eyes satisfy her that there is no deception, this time.'

The tone in which he spoke to me, and the minute or two that had passed since we left the garden, helped me to recover my spirits a little. What I might have done, at this critical moment, if all my life had been passed in service, I cannot say. As it was, possessing the feelings, the principles, and the bringing-up of a lady, I could not hesitate about the right course to pursue. My duty to myself, and my duty to Lady Glyde, alike forbade me to remain in the employment of a man who had shamefully deceived us both by a series of atrocious falsehoods.

'I must beg permission, Sir Percival, to speak a few words to you in private,' I said. 'Having done so, I

shall be ready to proceed with this person to Miss Halcombe's room.'

Mrs. Rubelle, whom I had indicated by a slight turn of my head, insolently sniffed at her nosegay, and walked away, with great deliberation, towards the house door.

'Well,' said Sir Percival, sharply; 'what is it now?'

'I wish to mention, sir, that I am desirous of resigning the situation I now hold at Blackwater Park.' That was literally how I put it. I was resolved that the first words spoken in his presence should be words which expressed my intention to leave his service.

He eyed me with one of his blackest looks, and thrust his hands savagely into the pockets of his riding-coat.

'Why?' he said; 'why, I should like to know?'

'It is not for me, Sir Percival, to express an opinion on what has taken place in this house. I desire to give no offence. I merely wish to say that I do not feel it consistent with my duty to Lady Glyde and to myself to remain any longer in your service.'

'Is it consistent with your duty to *me* to stand there, casting suspicion on me to my face?' he broke out, in his most violent manner. 'I see what you're driving at. You have taken your own mean, underhand view of an innocent deception practised on Lady Glyde, for her own good. It was essential to her health that she should have a change of air immediately—and, you know as well as I do, she would never have gone away, if she had been told Miss Halcombe was still left here. She has been deceived in her own interests—and I don't care who knows it. Go, if you like—there are plenty of housekeepers as good as you, to be had for the asking. Go, when you please—but take care how you spread scandals about me and my affairs, when you're out of

my service. Tell the truth, and nothing but the truth, or it will be the worse for you! See Miss Halcombe for yourself; see if she hasn't been as well taken care of in one part of the house as in the other. Remember the doctor's own orders that Lady Glyde was to have a change of air at the earliest possible opportunity. Bear all that well in mind—and then say anything against me and my proceedings if you dare!'

He poured out these words fiercely, all in a breath, walking backwards and forwards, and striking about him in the air with his whip.

Nothing that he said or did shook my opinion of the disgraceful series of falsehoods that he had told, in my presence, the day before, or of the cruel deception by which he had separated Lady Glyde from her sister, and had sent her uselessly to London, when she was half distracted with anxiety on Miss Halcombe's account. I naturally kept these thoughts to myself, and said nothing more to irritate him; but I was not the less resolved to persist in my purpose. A soft answer turneth away wrath; and I suppressed my own feelings, accordingly, when it was my turn to reply.

'While I am in your service, Sir Percival,' I said, 'I hope I know my duty well enough not to inquire into your motives. When I am out of your service, I hope I know my own place well enough not to speak of matters which don't concern me——'

'When do you want to go?' he asked, interrupting me without ceremony. 'Don't suppose I am axious to keep you—don't suppose I care about your leaving the house. I am perfectly fair and open in this matter, from first to last. When do you want to go?'

'I should wish to leave at your earliest convenience, Sir Percival.'

'My convenience has nothing to do with it. I shall be out of the house, for good and all, to-morrow morning; and I can settle your accounts to-night. If you want to study anybody's convenience, it had better be Miss Halcombe's. Mrs. Rubelle's time is up to-day; and she has reasons for wishing to be in London to-night. If you go at once, Miss Halcombe won't have a soul left here to look after her.'

I hope it is unnecessary for me to say that I was quite incapable of deserting Miss Halcombe in such an emergency as had now befallen Lady Glyde and herself. After first distinctly ascertaining from Sir Percival that Mrs. Rubelle was certain to leave at once if I took her place, and after also obtaining permission to arrange for Mr. Dawson's resuming his attendance on his patient, I willingly consented to remain at Blackwater Park until Miss Halcombe no longer required my services. It was settled that I should give Sir Percival's solicitor a week's notice before I left: and that he was to undertake the necessary arrangements for appointing my successor. The matter was discussed in very few words. At its conclusion, Sir Percival abruptly turned on his heel, and left me free to join Mrs. Rubelle. That singular foreign person had been sitting composedly on the door-step, all this time, waiting till I could follow her to Miss Halcombe's room.

I had hardly walked half way towards the house, when Sir Percival, who had withdrawn in the opposite direction, suddenly stopped, and called me back.

'Why are you leaving my service?' he asked.

The question was so extraordinary, after what had just passed between us, that I hardly knew what to say in answer to it.

'Mind! *I* don't know why you are going,' he went on.

'You must give a reason for leaving me, I suppose, when you get another situation. What reason? The breaking up of the family? Is that it?'

'There can be no positive objection, Sir Percival, to that reason——'

'Very well! That's all I want to know. If people apply for your character, that's your reason, stated by yourself. You go in consequence of the breaking up of the family.'

He turned away again, before I could say another word, and walked out rapidly into the grounds. His manner was as strange as his language. I acknowledge he alarmed me.

Even the patience of Mrs. Rubelle was getting exhausted, when I joined her at the house door.

'At last!' she said, with a shrug of her lean foreign shoulders. She led the way into the inhabited side of the house, ascended the stairs, and opened with her key the door at the end of the passage, which communicated with the old Elizabethan rooms—a door never previously used, in my time, at Blackwater Park. The rooms themselves I knew well, having entered them myself, on various occasions, from the other side of the house. Mrs. Rubelle stopped at the third door along the old gallery, handed me the key of it, with the key of the door of communication, and told me I should find Miss Halcombe in that room. Before I went in, I thought it desirable to make her understand that her attendance had ceased. Accordingly, I told her in plain words that the charge of the sick lady henceforth devolved entirely on myself.

'I am glad to hear it, ma'am,' said Mrs. Rubelle. 'I want to go very much.'

'Do you leave to-day?' I asked, to make sure of her.

'Now that you have taken charge, ma'am, I leave in half an hour's time. Sir Percival has kindly placed at my disposition the gardener, and the chaise, whenever I want them. I shall want them in half an hour's time, to go to the station. I am packed up, in anticipation, already. I wish you good day, ma'am.'

She dropped a brisk curtsey, and walked back along the gallery, humming a little tune, and keeping time to it cheerfully with the nosegay in her hand. I am sincerely thankful to say, that was the last I saw of Mrs. Rubelle.

When I went into the room, Miss Halcombe was asleep. I looked at her anxiously, as she lay in the dismal, high, old-fashioned bed. She was certainly not in any respect altered for the worse, since I had seen her last. She had not been neglected, I am bound to admit, in any way that I could perceive. The room was dreary, and dusty, and dark; but the window (looking on a solitary court-yard at the back of the house) was opened to let in the fresh air, and all that could be done to make the place comfortable had been done. The whole cruelty of Sir Percival's deception had fallen on poor Lady Glyde. The only ill usage which either he or Mrs. Rubelle had inflicted on Miss Halcombe, consisted, so far as I could see, in the first offence of hiding her away.

I stole back, leaving the sick lady still peacefully asleep, to give the gardener instructions about bringing the doctor. I begged the man, after he had taken Mrs. Rubelle to the station, to drive round by Mr. Dawson's, and leave a message, in my name, asking him to call and see me. I knew he would come on my account, and I knew he would remain when he found Count Fosco had left the house.

In due course of time, the gardener returned, and said that he had driven round by Mr. Dawson's residence, after leaving Mrs. Rubelle at the station. The doctor sent me word that he was poorly in health himself, but that he would call, if possible, the next morning.

Having delivered his message, the gardener was about to withdraw, but I stopped him to request that he would come back before dark, and sit up, that night, in one of the empty bedrooms, so as to be within call, in case I wanted him. He understood readily enough my unwillingness to be left alone all night, in the most desolate part of that desolate house, and we arranged that he should come in between eight and nine.

He came punctually; and I found cause to be thankful that I had adopted the precaution of calling him in. Before midnight, Sir Percival's strange temper broke out in the most violent and most alarming manner, and if the gardener had not been on the spot to pacify him on the instant, I am afraid to think what might have happened.

Almost all the afternoon and evening, he had been walking about the house and grounds in an unsettled, excitable manner; having, in all probability, as I thought, taken an excessive quantity of wine at his solitary dinner. However that may be, I heard his voice calling loudly and angrily, in the new wing of the house, as I was taking a turn backwards and forwards along the gallery, the last thing at night. The gardener immediately ran down to him; and I closed the door of communication, to keep the alarm, if possible, from reaching Miss Halcombe's ears. It was full half an hour before the gardener came back. He declared that his master was quite out of his senses—not through the excitement of drink, as I had supposed,

but through a kind of panic or frenzy of mind, for which it was impossible to account. He had found Sir Percival walking backwards and forwards by himself in the hall; swearing, with every appearance of the most violent passion, that he would not stop another minute alone in such a dungeon as his own house, and that he would take the first stage of his journey immediately, in the middle of the night. The gardener, on approaching him, had been hunted out, with oaths, and threats, to get the horse and chaise ready instantly. In a quarter of an hour Sir Percival had joined him in the yard, had jumped into the chaise, and, lashing the horse into a gallop, had driven himself away, with his face as pale as ashes in the moonlight. The gardener had heard him shouting and cursing at the lodge-keeper to get up and open the gate—had heard the wheels roll furiously on again, in the still night, when the gate was unlocked—and knew no more.

The next day, or a day or two after, I forget which, the chaise was brought back from Knowlesbury, our nearest town, by the ostler at the old inn. Sir Percival had stopped there, and had afterwards left by the train —for what destination the man could not tell. I never received any further information, either from himself, or from any one else, of Sir Percival's proceedings; and I am not even aware, at this moment, whether he is in England or out of it. He and I have not met, since he drove away, like an escaped criminal, from his own house; and it is my fervent hope and prayer that we may never meet again.

My own part of this sad family story is now drawing to an end.

I have been informed that the particulars of Miss Halcombe's waking, and of what passed between us

when she found me sitting by her bedside, are not material to the purpose which is to be answered by the present narrative. It will be sufficient for me to say, in this place, that she was not herself conscious of the means adopted to remove her from the inhabited to the uninhabited part of the house. She was in a deep sleep at the time, whether naturally or artificially produced she could not say. In my absence at Torquay, and in the absence of all the resident servants, except Margaret Porcher (who was perpetually eating, drinking, or sleeping, when she was not at work), the secret transfer of Miss Halcombe from one part of the house to the other was no doubt easily performed. Mrs. Rubelle (as I discovered for myself, in looking about the room) had provisions, and all other necessaries, together with the means of heating water, broth, and so on, without kindling a fire, placed at her disposal during the few days of her imprisonment with the sick lady. She had declined to answer the questions which Miss Halcombe naturally put; but had not, in other respects, treated her with unkindness or neglect. The disgrace of lending herself to a vile deception is the only disgrace with which I can conscientiously charge Mrs. Rubelle.

I need write no particular (and I am relieved to know it) of the effect produced on Miss Halcombe by the news of Lady Glyde's departure, or by the far more melancholy tidings which reached us only too soon afterwards at Blackwater Park. In both cases I prepared her mind beforehand as gently and as carefully as possible; having the doctor's advice to guide me, in the last case only, through Mr. Dawson's being too unwell to come to the house for some days after I had sent for him. It was a sad time, a time which it afflicts

me to think of, or to write of, now. The precious blessings of religious consolation which I endeavoured to convey, were long in reaching Miss Halcombe's heart; but I hope and believe they came home to her at last. I never left her till her strength was restored. The train which took me away from that miserable house, was the train which took her away also. We parted very mournfully in London. I remained with a relative at Islington; and she went on to Mr. Fairlie's house in Cumberland.

I have only a few lines more to write, before I close this painful statement. They are dictated by a sense of duty.

In the first place, I wish to record my own personal conviction that no blame whatever, in connexion with the events which I have now related, attaches to Count Fosco. I am informed that a dreadful suspicion has been raised, and that some very serious constructions are placed upon his lordship's conduct. My persuasion of the Count's innocence remains, however, quite unshaken. If he assisted Sir Percival in sending me to Torquay, he assisted under a delusion, for which, as a foreigner and a stranger, he was not to blame. If he was concerned in bringing Mrs. Rubelle to Blackwater Park, it was his misfortune and not his fault, when that foreign person was base enough to assist a deception planned and carried out by the master of the house. I protest, in the interests of morality, against blame being gratuitously and wantonly attached to the proceedings of the Count.

In the second place, I desire to express my regret at my own inability to remember the precise day on which Lady Glyde left Blackwater Park for London. I am told that it is of the last importance to ascertain the

exact date of that lamentable journey; and I have anxiously taxed my memory to recall it. The effort has been in vain. I can only remember now that it was towards the latter part of July. We all know the difficulty, after a lapse of time, of fixing precisely on a past date, unless it has been previously written down. That difficulty is greatly increased, in my case, by the alarming and confusing events which took place about the period of Lady Glyde's departure. I heartily wish I had made a memorandum at the time. I heartily wish my memory of the date was as vivid as my memory of that poor lady's face, when it looked at me sorrowfully for the last time from the carriage window.

THE STORY CONTINUED IN SEVERAL NARRATIVES.

1. *The Narrative of* HESTER PINHORN, *Cook in the Service of* COUNT FOSCO.

[*Taken down from her own statement.*]

I am sorry to say that I have never learnt to read or write. I have been a hard-working woman all my life, and have kept a good character. I know that it is a sin and wickedness to say the thing which is not; and I will truly beware of doing so on this occasion. All that I know, I will tell; and I humbly beg the gentleman who takes this down to put my language right as he goes on, and to make allowances for my being no scholar.

In this last summer, I happened to be out of place (through no fault of my own); and I heard of a situation, as plain cook, at Number Five, Forest-road, St. John's Wood. I took the place, on trial. My master's

name was Fosco. My mistress was an English lady. He was Count and she was Countess. There was a girl to do housemaid's work, when I got there. She was not over clean or tidy—but there was no harm in her. I and she were the only servants in the house.

Our master and mistress came after we got in. And, as soon as they did come, we were told, down stairs, that company was expected from the country.

The company was my mistress's niece, and the back bedroom on the first floor was got ready for her. My mistress mentioned to me that Lady Glyde (that was her name) was in poor health, and that I must be particular in my cooking accordingly. She was to come that day, as well as I can remember—but whatever you do, don't trust *my* memory in the matter. I am sorry to say it's no use asking me about days of the month, and such-like. Except Sundays, half my time I take no heed of them; being a hard-working woman and no scholar. All I know is, Lady Glyde came; and, when she did come, a fine fright she gave us all, surely. I don't know how master brought her to the house, being hard at work at the time. But he did bring her in the afternoon, I think; and the housemaid opened the door to them, and showed them into the parlour. Before she had been long down in the kitchen again with me, we heard a hurry-skurry, upstairs, and the parlour bell ringing like mad, and my mistress's voice calling out for help.

We both ran up; and there we saw the lady laid on the sofa, with her face ghastly white, and her hands fast clenched, and her head drawn down to one side. She had been taken with a sudden fright, my mistress said; and master he told us she was in a fit of convulsions. I ran out, knowing the neighbourhood a little

better than the rest of them, to fetch the nearest doctor's help. The nearest help was at Goodricke's and Garth's, who worked together as partners, and had a good name and connexion, as I have heard, all round St. John's Wood. Mr. Goodricke was in; and he came back with me directly.

It was some time before he could make himself of much use. The poor unfortunate lady fell out of one fit into another—and went on so, till she was quite wearied out, and as helpless as a new-born babe. We then got her to bed. Mr. Goodricke went away to his house for medicine, and came back again in quarter of an hour or less. Besides the medicine he brought a bit of hollow mahogany wood with him, shaped like a kind of trumpet; and, after waiting a little while, he put one end over the lady's heart and the other to his ear, and listened carefully.

When he had done, he says to my mistress, who was in the room, 'This is a very serious case,' he says; 'I recommend you to write to Lady Glyde's friends directly.' My mistress says to him, 'Is it heart-disease?' And he says, 'Yes; heart-disease of a most dangerous kind.' He told her exactly what he thought was the matter, which I was not clever enough to understand. But I know this, he ended by saying that he was afraid neither his help nor any other doctor's help was likely to be of much service.

My mistress took this ill news more quietly than my master. He was a big, fat, odd sort of elderly man, who kept birds and white mice, and spoke to them as if they were so many Christian children. He seemed terribly cut up by what had happened. 'Ah! poor Lady Glyde! poor dear Lady Glyde!' he says—and went stalking about, wringing his fat hands more like a play-

actor than a gentleman. For one question my mistress asked the doctor about the lady's chances of getting round, he asked a good fifty at least. I declare he quite tormented us all—and, when he was quiet at last, out he went into the bit of back garden, picking trumpery little nosegays, and asking me to take them up-stairs and make the sick-room look pretty with them. As if *that* did any good. I think he must have been, at times, a little soft in his head. But he was not a bad master: he had a monstrous civil tongue of his own; and a jolly, easy, coaxing way with him. I liked him a deal better than my mistress. She was a hard one, if ever there was a hard one yet.

Towards night-time, the lady roused up a little. She had been so wearied out, before that, by the convulsions, that she never stirred hand or foot, or spoke a word to anybody. She moved in the bed now; and stared about her at the room and us in it. She must have been a nice-looking lady, when well, with light hair, and blue eyes, and all that. Her rest was troubled at night—at least so I heard from my mistress, who sat up alone with her. I only went in once before going to bed, to see if I could be of any use; and then she was talking to herself, in a confused, rambling manner. She seemed to want sadly to speak to somebody, who was absent from her somewhere. I couldn't catch the name, the first time; and the second time master knocked at the door, with his regular mouthful of questions, and another of his trumpery nosegays.

When I went in, early the next morning, the lady was clean worn out again, and lay in a kind of faint sleep. Mr. Goodricke brought his partner, Mr. Garth, with him to advise. They said she must not be disturbed out of her rest, on any account. They asked my mis-

tress a many questions, at the other end of the room, about what the lady's health had been in past times, and who had attended her, and whether she had ever suffered much and long together under distress of mind. I remember my mistress said, 'Yes,' to that last question. And Mr. Goodricke looked at Mr. Garth, and shook his head; and Mr. Garth looked at Mr. Goodricke, and shook his head. They seemed to think that the distress might have something to do with the mischief at the lady's heart. She was but a frail thing to look at, poor creature! Very little strength, at any time, I should say—very little strength.

Later on the same morning, when she woke, the lady took a sudden turn, and got seemingly a great deal better. I was not let in again to see her, no more was the housemaid, for the reason that she was not to be disturbed by strangers. What I heard of her being better was through my master. He was in wonderful good spirits about the change, and looked in at the kitchen window from the garden, with his great big curly-brimmed white hat on, to go out.

'Good Mrs. Cook,' says he, 'Lady Glyde is better. My mind is more easy than it was; and I am going out to stretch my big legs with a sunny little summer walk. Shall I order for you, shall I market for you, Mrs. Cook? What are you making there? A nice tart for dinner? Much crust, if you please—much crisp crust, my dear, that melts and crumbles delicious in the mouth. That was his way. He was past sixty, and fond of pastry. Just think of that!

The doctor came again in the forenoon, and saw for himself that Lady Glyde had woke up better. He forbid us to talk to her, or to let her talk to us, in case she was that way disposed; saying she must be kept

quiet before all things, and encouraged to sleep, as much as possible. She did not seem to want to talk whenever I saw her—except overnight, when I couldn't make out what she was saying—she seemed too much worn down. Mr. Goodricke was not nearly in such good spirits about her as master. He said nothing when he came down stairs, except that he would call again at five o'clock.

About that time (which was before master came home again), the bell rang hard from the bedroom, and my mistress ran out into the landing, and called for me to go for Mr. Goodricke, and tell him the lady had fainted. I got on my bonnet and shawl, when, as good luck would have it, the doctor himself came to the house for his promised visit.

I let him in, and went up-stairs along with him. 'Lady Glyde was just as usual,' says my mistress to him at the door; 'she was awake, and looking about her, in a strange, forlorn manner, when I heard her give a sort of half cry, and she fainted in a moment.' The doctor went up to the bed, and stooped down over the sick lady. He looked very serious, all on a sudden, at the sight of her; and put his hand on her heart.

My mistress stared hard in Mr. Goodricke's face. 'Not dead!' says she; whispering, and turning all of a tremble from head to foot.

'Yes,' says the doctor, very quiet and grave. 'Dead. I was afraid it would happen suddenly, when I examined her heart yesterday.' My mistress stepped back from the bedside, while he was speaking, and trembled and trembled again. 'Dead!' she whispers to herself; 'dead so suddenly! dead so soon! What will the Count say?' Mr. Goodricke advised her to go down-stairs, and quiet herself a little. 'You have been sitting up all

night,' says he; 'and your nerves are shaken. This person,' says he, meaning me, 'this person will stay in the room, till I can send for the necessary assistance.' My mistress did as he told her. 'I must prepare the Count,' she says. 'I must carefully prepare the Count.' And so she left us, shaking from head to foot, and went out.

'Your master is a foreigner,' says Mr. Goodricke, when my mistress had left us. 'Does he understand about registering the death?' 'I can't rightly tell, sir,' says I; 'but I should think not.' The doctor considered a minute; and then, says he, 'I don't usually do such things,' says he, 'but it may save the family trouble in this case, if I register the death myself. I shall pass the district office in half an hour's time; and I can easily look in. Mention, if you please, that I will do so.' 'Yes, sir,' says I, 'with thanks, I'm sure, for your kindness in thinking of it.' 'You don't mind staying here, till I can send you the proper person?' says he. 'No, sir,' says I; 'I'll stay with the poor lady, till then. I suppose nothing more could be done, sir, than was done?' says I. 'No,' says he; 'nothing; she must have suffered sadly before ever I saw her: the case was hopeless when I was called in.' 'Ah, dear me! we all come to it, sooner or later, don't we, sir?' says I. He gave no answer to that; he didn't seem to care about talking. He said, 'Good day,' and went out.

I stopped by the bedside from that time, till the time when Mr. Goodricke sent the person in, as he had promised. She was, by name, Jane Gould. I considered her to be a respectable-looking woman. She made no remark, except to say that she understood what was wanted of her, and that she had winded a many of them in her time.

How master bore the news, when he first heard it, is

more than I can tell; not having been present. When I did see him, he looked awfully overcome by it, to be sure. He sat quiet in a corner, with his fat hands hanging over his thick knees, and his head down, and his eyes looking at nothing. He seemed not so much sorry, as scared and dazed like, by what had happened. My mistress managed all that was to be done about the funeral. It must have cost a sight of money: the coffin, in particular, being most beautiful. The dead lady's husband was away, as we heard, in foreign parts. But my mistress (being her aunt) settled it with her friends in the country (Cumberland, I think) that she should be buried there, in the same grave along with her mother. Everything was done handsomely, in respect of the funeral, I say again; and master went down to attend the burying in the country himself. He looked grand in his deep mourning, with his big solemn face, and his slow walk, and his broad hatband—that he did!

In conclusion, I have to say, in answer to questions put to me.

(1) That neither I nor my fellow-servant ever saw my master give Lady Glyde any medicine himself.

(2) That he was never, to my knowledge and belief, left alone in the room with Lady Glyde.

(3) That I am not able to say what caused the sudden fright, which my mistress informed me had seized the lady on her first coming into the house. The cause was never explained, either to me or to my fellow-servant.

The above statement has been read over in my presence. I have nothing to add to it, or to take away from it. I say, on my oath as a Christian woman, This is the truth.

(Signed) HESTER PINHORN, Her + Mark.

2. *The Narrative of the Doctor.*

To the Registrar of the Sub-District in which the under-mentioned Death took place.—I hereby certify that I attended Lady Glyde, aged Twenty-One last Birthday; that I last saw her, on Thursday, the 25th of July, 1850; that she died on the same day at No. 5, Forest-road, St. John's Wood; and that the cause of her death was, Aneurism. Duration of Disease, not known.

(Signed) ALFRED GOODRICKE.
Prof. Title. *M.R.C.S. Eng. L.S.A.*
Address. 12, *Croydon Gardens, St. John's Wood.*

3. *The Narrative of* JANE GOULD.

I was the person sent in by Mr. Goodricke, to do what was right and needful by the remains of a lady, who had died at the house named in the certificate which precedes this. I found the body in charge of the servant, Hester Pinhorn. I remained with it, and prepared it, at the proper time, for the grave. It was laid in the coffin, in my presence; and I afterwards saw the coffin screwed down, previous to its removal. When that had been done, and not before, I received what was due to me, and left the house. I refer persons who may wish to investigate my character to Mr. Goodricke. He will bear witness that I can be trusted to tell the truth.

(Signed) JANE GOULD.

4. *The Narrative of the Tombstone.*

Sacred to the memory of Laura, Lady Glyde, wife of Sir Percival Glyde, Bart., of Blackwater Park, Hamp-

shire; and daughter of the late Philip Fairlie, Esq., of Limmeridge House, in this parish. Born, March 27th, 1829; married, December 22nd, 1849; died, July 25th, 1850.

5. *The Narrative of* WALTER HARTRIGHT.

Early in the summer of 1850, I, and my surviving companions, left the wilds and forests of Central America for home. Arrived at the coast, we took ship there for England. The vessel was wrecked in the Gulf of Mexico; I was among the few saved from the sea. It was my third escape from peril of death. Death by disease, death by the Indians, death by drowning—all three had approached me; all three had passed me by.

The survivors of the wreck were rescued by an American vessel, bound for Liverpool. The ship reached her port on the thirteenth day of October, 1850. We landed late in the afternoon; and I arrived in London the same night.

These pages are not the record of my wanderings and my dangers away from home. The motives which led me from my country and my friends to a new world of adventure and peril are known. From that self-imposed exile I came back, as I hoped, prayed, believed I should come back—a changed man. In the waters of a new life I had tempered my nature afresh. In the stern school of extremity and danger my will had learnt to be strong, my heart to be resolute, my mind to rely on itself. I had gone out to fly from my own future. I came back to face it, as a man should.

To face it with that inevitable suppression of myself, which I knew it would demand from me. I had parted

with the worst bitterness of the past, but not with my heart's remembrance of the sorrow and the tenderness of that memorable time. I had not ceased to feel the one irreparable disappointment of my life. I had only learnt to bear it. Laura Fairlie was in all my thoughts when the ship bore me away, and I looked my last at England. Laura Fairlie was in all my thoughts when the ship brought me back, and the morning light showed the friendly shore in view.

My pen traces the old letters as my heart goes back to the old love. I write of her as Laura Fairlie still. It is hard to think of her, it is hard to speak of her, by her husband's name.

There are no more words of explanation to add, on my appearing for the second time in these pages. This narrative, if I have the strength and the courage to write it, may now go on.

My first anxieties and first hopes, when the morning came, centred in my mother and my sister. I felt the necessity of preparing them for the joy and surprise of my return, after an absence, during which it had been impossible for them to receive any tidings of me for months past. Early in the morning, I sent a letter to the Hampstead Cottage; and followed it myself in an hour's time.

When the first meeting was over, when our quiet and composure of other days began gradually to return to us, I saw something in my mother's face which told me that a secret oppression lay heavy on her heart. There was more than love—there was sorrow in the anxious eyes that looked on me so tenderly; there was pity in the kind hand that slowly and fondly strengthened its hold on mine. We had no concealments from each

other. She knew how the hope of my life had been wrecked—she knew why I had left her. It was on my lips to ask as composedly as I could, if any letter had come for me from Miss Halcombe—if there was any news of her sister that I might hear. But, when I looked in my mother's face, I lost courage to put the question even in that guarded form. I could only say, doubtingly and restrainedly.

'You have something to tell me.'

My sister, who had been sitting opposite to us, rose suddenly, without a word of explanation—rose, and left the room.

My mother moved closer to me on the sofa and put her arms round my neck. Those fond arms trembled; the tears flowed fast over the faithful loving face.

'Walter!' she whispered—'my own darling! my heart is heavy for you. Oh, my son! my son! try to remember that I am still left!'

My head sank on her bosom. She had said all, in saying those words.

* * * * *

It was the morning of the third day since my return—the morning of the sixteenth of October.

I had remained with them at the Cottage; I had tried hard not to embitter the happiness of my return, to *them*, as it was embittered to *me*. I had done all man could to rise after the shock, and accept my life resignedly—to let my great sorrow come in tenderness to my heart, and not in despair. It was useless and hopeless. No tears soothed my aching eyes; no relief came to me from my sister's sympathy or my mother's love.

On that third morning, I opened my heart to them.

At last the words passed my lips which I had longed to speak on the day when my mother told me of her death.

'Let me go away alone, for a little while,' I said. 'I shall bear it better when I have looked once more at the place where I first saw her—when I have knelt and prayed by the grave where they have laid her to rest.'

I departed on my journey—my journey to the grave of Laura Fairlie.

It was a quiet autumn afternoon, when I stopped at the solitary station, and set forth alone, on foot, by the well-remembered road. The waning sun was shining faintly through thin white clouds; the air was warm and still; the peacefulness of the lonely country was over-shadowed and saddened by the influence of the falling year.

I reached the moor; I stood again on the brow of the hill; I looked on, along the path—and there were the familiar garden trees in the distance, the clear sweeping semicircle of the drive, the high white walls of Limmeridge House. The chances and changes, the wanderings and dangers of months and months past, all shrank and shrivelled to nothing in my mind. It was like yesterday, since my feet had last trodden the fragrant heathy ground! I thought I should see her coming to meet me, with her little straw hat shading her face, her simple dress fluttering in the air, and her well-filled sketch-book ready in her hand.

Oh, Death, thou hast thy sting! oh, Grave, thou hast thy victory!

I turned aside; and there below me, in the glen, was the lonesome gray church; the porch where I had waited for the coming of the woman in white; the hills encircling the quiet burial-ground; the brook bubbling cold over its stony bed. There was the marble cross,

fair and white, at the head of the tomb—the tomb that now rose over mother and daughter alike.

I approached the grave. I crossed once more the low stone stile, and bared my head as I touched the sacred ground. Sacred to gentleness and goodness; sacred to reverence and grief.

I stopped before the pedestal from which the cross rose. On one side of it, on the side nearest to me, the newly-cut inscription met my eyes—the hard, clear, cruel black letters which told the story of her life and death. I tried to read them. I did read, as far as the name. 'Sacred to the Memory of Laura——' The kind blue eyes dim with tears; the fair head dropping wearily; the innocent, parting words which implored me to leave her—oh, for a happier last memory of her than this; the memory I took away with me, the memory I bring back with me to her grave!

A second time I tried to read the inscription. I saw, at the end, the date of her death; and above it——

Above it, there were lines on the marble, there was a name among them, which disturbed my thoughts of her. I went round to the other side of the grave, where there was nothing to read—nothing of earthly vileness to force its way between her spirit and mine.

I knelt down by the tomb. I laid my hands, I laid my head, on the broad white stone, and closed my weary eyes on the earth around, on the light above. I let her come back to me. Oh, my love! my love! my heart may speak to you *now!* It is yesterday again, since we parted—yesterday, since your dear hand lay in mine—yesterday, since my eyes looked their last on you. My love! my love!

* * * * *

Time had flowed on; and Silence had fallen, like thick night, over its course.

The first sound that came, after the heavenly peace, rustled faintly, like a passing breath of air, over the grass of the burial-ground. I heard it nearing me slowly, until it came changed to my ear—came like footsteps moving onward—then stopped.

I looked up.

The sunset was near at hand. The clouds had parted; the slanting light fell mellow over the hills. The last of the day was cold and clear and still in the quiet valley of the dead.

Beyond me, in the burial-ground, standing together in the cold clearness of the lower light, I saw two women. They were looking towards the tomb; looking towards *me*.

Two.

They came a little on; and stopped again. Their veils were down, and hid their faces from me. When they stopped, one of them raised her veil. In the still evening light, I saw the face of Marian Halcombe.

Changed, changed as if years had passed over it! The eyes large and wild, and looking at me with a strange terror in them. The face worn and wasted piteously. Pain and fear and grief written on her as with a brand.

I took one step towards her from the grave. She never moved—she never spoke. The veiled woman with her cried out faintly. I stopped. The springs of my life fell low; and the shuddering of an unutterable dread crept over me from head to foot.

The woman with the veiled face moved away from her companion, and came towards me slowly. Left by herself, standing by herself, Marian Halcombe spoke. It was the voice that I remembered—the voice

not changed, like the frightened eyes and the wasted face.

'My dream! my dream!' I heard her say those words softly, in the awful silence. She sank on her knees, and raised her clasped hands to the heaven. 'Father! strengthen him. Father! help him, in his hour of need.'

The woman came on; slowly and silently came on. I looked at her—at her, and at none other, from that moment.

The voice that was praying for me, faltered and sank low—then rose on a sudden, and called affrightedly, called despairingly to me to come away.

But the veiled woman had possession of me, body and soul. She stopped on one side of the grave. We stood face to face, with the tombstone between us. She was close to the inscription on the side of the pedestal. Her gown touched the black letters.

The voice came nearer, and rose and rose more passionately still. 'Hide your face! don't look at her! Oh, for God's sake spare him!——'

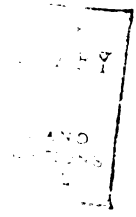
The woman lifted her veil.

'Sacred to the Memory of Laura, Lady Glyde——'

Laura, Lady Glyde, was standing by the inscription, and was looking at me over the grave.

[*The Second Epoch of the Story closes here.*]

The woman lifted her veil.



THE THIRD EPOCH.

The Story continued by WALTER HARTRIGHT.

I.

I open a new page. I advance my narrative by one week.

The history of the interval which I thus pass over must remain unrecorded. My heart turns faint, my mind sinks in darkness and confusion when I think of it. This must not be if I, who write, am to guide, as I ought, you who read. This must not be if the clue that leads through the windings of the Story is to remain, from end to end, untangled in my hands.

A life suddenly changed—its whole purpose created afresh; its hopes and fears, its struggles, its interests, and its sacrifices, all turned at once and for ever into a new direction—this is the prospect which now opens before me like the burst of view from a mountain's top. I left my narrative in the quiet shadow of Limmeridge church: I resume it, one week later, in the stir and turmoil of a London street.

The street is in a populous and a poor neighbourhood. The ground floor of one of the houses in it is occupied by a small newsvendor's shop; and the first floor and the second are let as furnished lodgings of the humblest kind.

I have taken those two floors in an assumed name. On the upper floor I live, with a room to work in, a room to sleep in. On the lower floor, under the same assumed name, two women live, who are described as my sisters. I get my bread by drawing and engraving on wood for the cheap periodicals. My sisters are supposed to help me by taking in a little needlework. Our poor place of abode, our humble calling, our assumed relationship, and our assumed name, are all used alike as a means of hiding us in the house-forest of London. We are numbered no longer with the people whose lives are open and known. I am an obscure, unnoticed man, without patron or friend to help me. Marian Halcombe is nothing now, but my eldest sister, who provides for our household wants by the toil of her own hands. We two, in the estimation of others, are at once the dupes and the agents of a daring imposture. We are supposed to be the accomplices of mad Anne Catherick, who claims the name, the place, and the living personality of dead Lady Glyde.

That is our situation. That is the changed aspect in which we three must appear, henceforth, in this narrative, for many and many a page to come.

In the eye of reason and of law, in the estimation of relatives and friends, according to every received formality of civilised society, 'Laura, Lady Glyde,' lay buried with her mother in Limmeridge churchyard. Torn in her own lifetime from the list of the living, the daughter of Philip Fairlie and the wife of Percival Glyde might still exist for her sister, might still exist for me, but to all the world beside she was dead. Dead to her uncle who had renounced her; dead to the servants of the house who had failed to recognise her;

dead to the persons in authority who had transmitted her fortune to her husband and her aunt; dead to my mother and my sister, who believed me to be the dupe of an adventuress and the victim of a fraud; socially, morally, legally—dead.

And yet alive! Alive in poverty and in hiding. Alive, with the poor drawing-master to fight her battle, and to win the way back for her to her place in the world of living beings.

Did no suspicion, excited by my own knowledge of Anne Catherick's resemblance to her, cross my mind, when her face was first revealed to me? Not the shadow of a suspicion, from the moment when she lifted her veil by the side of the inscription which recorded her death.

Before the sun of that day had set, before the last glimpse of the home which was closed against her had passed from our view, the farewell words I spoke when we parted at Limmeridge House had been recalled by both of us; repeated by me, recognised by her. 'If ever the time comes when the devotion of my whole heart and soul and strength will give you a moment's happiness, or spare you a moment's sorrow, will you try to remember the poor drawing-master who has taught you?' She, who now remembered so little of the trouble and terror of a later time, remembered those words, and laid her poor head innocently and trustingly on the bosom of the man who had spoken them. In that moment, when she called me by my name, when she said, 'They have tried to make me forget everything, Walter; but I remember Marian, and I remember *you*' —in that moment, I, who had long since given her my love, gave her my life, and thanked God that it was mine to bestow on her. Yes! the time had come.

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From thousands on thousands of miles away; through forest and wilderness, where companions stronger than I had fallen by my side, through peril of death thrice renewed, and thrice escaped, the Hand that leads men on the dark road to the future, had led me to meet that time. Forlorn and disowned, sorely tried and sadly changed; her beauty faded, her mind clouded; robbed of her station in the world, of her place among living creatures—the devotion I had promised, the devotion of my whole heart and soul and strength might be laid blamelessly, now, at those dear feet. In the right of her calamity, in the right of her friendlessness, she was mine at last! Mine to support, to protect, to cherish, to restore. Mine to love and honour as father and brother both. Mine to vindicate through all risks and all sacrifices—through the hopeless struggle against Rank and Power, through the long fight with armed deceit and fortified Success, through the waste of my reputation, through the loss of my friends, through the hazard of my life.

II.

My position is defined; my motives are acknowledged. The story of Marian and the story of Laura must come next.

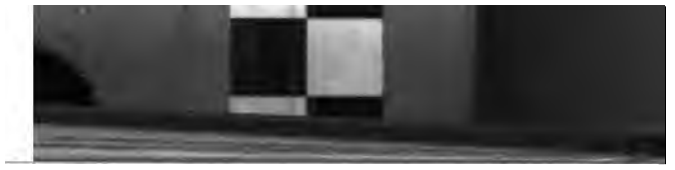
I shall relate both narratives, not in the words (often interrupted, often inevitably confused) of the speakers themselves, but in the words of the brief, plain, studiously simple abstract which I committed to writing for my own guidance, and for the guidance of my legal adviser. So the tangled web will be most speedily and most intelligibly unrolled.

The story of Marian begins where the narrative of the housekeeper at Blackwater Park left off.

On Lady Glyde's departure from her husband's house, the fact of that departure, and the necessary statement of the circumstances under which it had taken place, were communicated to Miss Halcombe by the housekeeper. It was not till some days afterwards (how many days exactly, Mrs. Michelson, in the absence of any written memorandum on the subject, could not undertake to say) that a letter arrived from Madame Fosco announcing Lady Glyde's sudden death in Count Fosco's house. The letter avoided mentioning dates, and left it to Mrs. Michelson's discretion to break the news at once to Miss Halcombe, or to defer doing so until that lady's health should be more firmly established.

Having consulted Mr. Dawson (who had been himself delayed by ill health in resuming his attendance at Blackwater Park), Mrs. Michelson, by the doctor's advice, and in the doctor's presence, communicated the news, either on the day when the letter was received, or on the day after. It is not necessary to dwell here upon the effect which the intelligence of Lady Glyde's sudden death produced on her sister. It is only useful to the present purpose to say that she was not able to travel for more than three weeks afterwards. At the end of that time she proceeded to London, accompanied by the housekeeper. They parted there; Mrs. Michelson previously informing Miss Halcombe of her address, in case they might wish to communicate at a future period.

On parting with the housekeeper, Miss Halcombe went at once to the office of Messrs. Gilmore and Kyrle,



to consult with the latter gentleman, in Mr. Gilmore's absence. She mentioned to Mr. Kyrle, what she had thought it desirable to conceal from every one else (Mrs. Michelson included)—her suspicion of the circumstances under which Lady Glyde was said to have met her death. Mr. Kyrle, who had previously given friendly proof of his anxiety to serve Miss Halcombe, at once undertook to make such inquiries as the delicate and dangerous nature of the investigation proposed to him would permit.

To exhaust this part of the subject before going farther, it may be here mentioned that Count Fosco offered every facility to Mr. Kyrle, on that gentleman stating that he was sent by Miss Halcombe to collect such particulars as had not yet reached her of Lady Glyde's decease. Mr. Kyrle was placed in communication with the medical man, Mr. Goodricke, and with the two servants. In the absence of any means of ascertaining the exact date of Lady Glyde's departure from Blackwater Park, the result of the doctor's and the servants' evidence, and of the volunteered statements of Count Fosco and his wife, was conclusive to the mind of Mr. Kyrle. He could only assume that the intensity of Miss Halcombe's suffering under the loss of her sister, had misled her judgment in a most deplorable manner; and he wrote her word that the shocking suspicion to which she had alluded in his presence, was, in his opinion, destitute of the smallest fragment of foundation in truth. Thus the investigation by Mr. Gilmore's partner began and ended.

Meanwhile, Miss Halcombe had returned to Limmeridge House; and had there collected all the additional information which she was able to obtain.

Mr. Fairlie had received his first intimation of his

niece's death from his sister, Madame Fosco; this letter also not containing any exact reference to dates. He had sanctioned his sister's proposal that the deceased lady should be laid in her mother's grave in Limmeridge churchyard. Count Fosco had accompanied the remains to Cumberland, and had attended the funeral at Limmeridge, which took place on the 30th of July. It was followed, as a mark of respect, by all the inhabitants of the village and the neighbourhood. On the next day, the inscription (originally drawn out, it was said, by the aunt of the deceased lady, and submitted for approval to her brother, Mr. Fairlie) was engraved on one side of the monument over the tomb.

On the day of the funeral and for one day after it Count Fosco had been received as a guest at Limmeridge House; but no interview had taken place between Mr. Fairlie and himself, by the former gentleman's desire. They had communicated by writing; and, through this medium, Count Fosco had made Mr. Fairlie acquainted with the details of his niece's last illness and death. The letter presenting this information added no new facts to the facts already known; but one very remarkable paragraph was contained in the postscript. It referred to Anne Catherick.

The substance of the paragraph in question was as follows:

It first informed Mr. Fairlie that Anne Catherick (of whom he might hear full particulars from Miss Halcombe when she reached Limmeridge) had been traced and recovered in the neighbourhood of Blackwater Park, and had been, for the second time, placed under the charge of the medical man from whose custody she had once escaped.

This was the first part of the postscript. The second

part warned Mr. Fairlie that Anne Catherick's mental malady had been aggravated by her long freedom from control; and that the insane hatred and distrust of Sir Percival Glyde, which had been one of her most marked delusions in former times, still existed, under a newly-acquired form. The unfortunate woman's last idea in connexion with Sir Percival, was the idea of annoying and distressing him, and of elevating herself, as she supposed, in the estimation of the patients and nurses, by assuming the character of his deceased wife; the scheme of this personation having evidently occurred to her, after a stolen interview which she had succeeded in obtaining with Lady Glyde, and at which she had observed the extraordinary accidental likeness between the deceased lady and herself. It was to the last degree improbable that she would succeed a second time in escaping from the Asylum; but it was just possible she might find some means of annoying the late Lady Glyde's relatives with letters; and, in that case, Mr. Fairlie was warned beforehand how to receive them.

The postscript, expressed in these terms, was shown to Miss Halcombe, when she arrived at Limmeridge. There were also placed in her possession the clothes Lady Glyde had worn, and the other effects she had brought with her to her aunt's house. They had been carefully collected and sent to Cumberland by Madame Fosco.

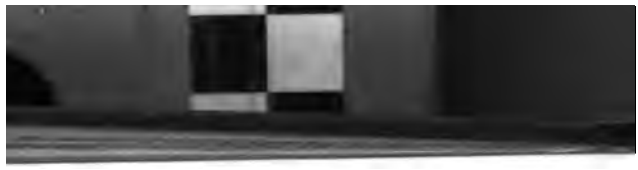
Such was the posture of affairs when Miss Halcombe reached Limmeridge, in the early part of September.

Shortly afterwards, she was confined to her room by a relapse; her weakened physical energies giving way under the severe mental affliction from which she was now suffering. On getting stronger again, in a month's

time, her suspicion of the circumstances described as attending her sister's death, still remaind unshaken. She had heard nothing, in the interim, of Sir Percival Glyde; but letters had reached her from Madame Fosco, making the most affectionate inquiries on the part of her husband and herself. Instead of answering these letters, Miss Halcombe caused the house in St. John's Wood, and the proceedings of its inmates to be privately watched.

Nothing doubtful was discovered. The same result attended the next investigations, which were secretly instituted on the subject of Mrs. Rubelle. She had arrived in London, about six months before, with her husband. They had come from Lyons; and they had taken a house in the neighbourhood of Leicester-square, to be fitted up as a boarding-house for foreigners, who were expected to visit England in large numbers to see the Exhibition of 1851. Nothing was known against husband or wife, in the neighbourhood. They were quiet people; and they had paid their way honestly up to the present time. The final inquiries related to Sir Percival Glyde. He was settled in Paris; and living there quietly in a small circle of English and French friends.

Foiled at all points, but still not able to rest, Miss Halcombe next determined to visit the Asylum in which she then supposed Anne Catherick to be for the second time confined. She had felt a strong curiosity about the woman in former days; and she was now doubly interested—first, in ascertaining whether the report of Anne Catherick's attempted personation of Lady Glyde was true; and, secondly (if it proved to be true), in discovering for herself what the poor creature's real motives were for attempting the deceit.



Although Count Fosco's letter to Mr. Fairlie did not mention the address of the Asylum, that important omission cast no difficulties in Miss Halcombe's way. When Mr. Hartright had met Anne Catherick at Limmeridge, she had informed him of the locality in which the house was situated; and Miss Halcombe had noted down the direction in her diary, with all the other particulars of the interview, exactly as she heard them from Mr. Hartright's own lips. Accordingly, she looked back at the entry, and extracted the address; furnished herself with the Count's letter to Mr. Fairlie, as a species of credential which might be useful to her; and started by herself for the Asylum, on the eleventh of October.

She passed the night of the eleventh in London. It had been her intention to sleep at the house inhabited by Lady Glyde's old governess; but Mrs. Vesey's agitation at the sight of her lost pupil's nearest and dearest friend was so distressing, that Miss Halcombe considerately refrained from remaining in her presence, and removed to a respectable boarding-house in the neighbourhood, recommended by Mrs. Vesey's married sister. The next day, she proceeded to the Asylum, which was situated not far from London, on the northern side of the metropolis.

She was immediately admitted to see the proprietor.

At first, he appeared to be decidedly unwilling to let her communicate with his patient. But, on her showing him the postscript to Count Fosco's letter—on her reminding him that she was the 'Miss Halcombe' there referred to; that she was a near relative of the deceased Lady Glyde; and that she was therefore naturally interested, for family reasons, in observing for herself the extent of Anne Catherick's delusion, in relation to her late sister—the tone and manner of the owner of

the Asylum altered, and he withdrew his objections. He probably felt that a continued refusal, under these circumstances, would not only be an act of discourtesy in itself, but would also imply that the proceedings in his establishment were not of a nature to bear investigation by respectable strangers.

Miss Halcombe's own impression was that the owner of the Asylum had not been received into the confidence of Sir Percival and the Count. His consenting at all to let her visit his patient seemed to afford one proof of this, and his readiness in making admissions which could scarcely have escaped the lips of an accomplice, certainly appeared to furnish another.

For example, in the course of the introductory conversation which took place, he informed Miss Halcombe that Anne Catherick had been brought back to him, with the necessary order and certificates, by Count Fosco, on the twenty-seventh of July; the Count also producing a letter of explanations and instructions, signed by Sir Percival Glyde. On receiving his inmate again, the proprietor of the Asylum acknowledged that he had observed some curious personal changes in her. Such changes, no doubt, were not without precedent in his experience of persons mentally afflicted. Insane people were often, at one time, outwardly as well as inwardly, unlike what they were at another; the change from better to worse, or from worse to better, in the madness, having a necessary tendency to produce alterations of appearance externally. He allowed for these; and he allowed also for the modification in the form of Anne Catherick's delusion, which was reflected, no doubt, in her manner and expression. But he was still perplexed, at times, by certain differences between his patient before she had escaped, and his patient since

she had been brought back. Those differences were too minute to be described. He could not say, of course, that she was absolutely altered in height or shape or complexion, or in the colour of her hair and eyes, or in the general form of her face; the change was something that he felt, more than something that he saw. In short, the case had been a puzzle from the first, and one more perplexity was added to it now.

It cannot be said that this conversation led to the result of even partially preparing Miss Halcombe's mind for what was to come. But it produced, nevertheless, a very serious effect upon her. She was so completely unnerved by it, that some little time elapsed before she could summon composure enough to follow the proprietor of the Asylum to that part of the house in which the inmates were confined.

On inquiry, it turned out that the supposed Anne Catherick was then taking exercise in the grounds attached to the establishment. One of the nurses volunteered to conduct Miss Halcombe to the place; the proprietor of the Asylum remaining in the house for a few minutes to attend to a case which required his services, and then engaging to join his visitor in the grounds.

The nurse led Miss Halcombe to a distant part of the property, which was prettily laid out; and, after looking about her a little, turned into a turf walk, shaded by a shrubbery on either side. About half way down this walk, two women were slowly approaching. The nurse pointed to them, and said, 'There is Anne Catherick, ma'am, with the attendant who waits on her. The attendant will answer any questions you wish to put.' With those words the nurse left her, to return to the duties of the house.

Miss Halcombe advanced on her side, and the women advanced on theirs. When they were within a dozen paces of each other, one of the women stopped for an instant, looked eagerly at the strange lady, shook off the nurse's grasp on her, and, the next moment, rushed into Miss Halcombe's arms. In that moment Miss Halcombe recognised her sister—recognised the dead-alive.

Fortunately for the success of the measures taken subsequently, no one was present, at that moment, but the nurse. She was a young woman; and she was so startled that she was at first quite incapable of interfering. When she was able to do so, her whole services were required by Miss Halcombe, who had for the moment sunk altogether in the effort to keep her own senses under the shock of the discovery. After waiting a few minutes in the fresh air and the cool shade, her natural energy and courage helped her a little, and she became sufficiently mistress of herself to feel the necessity of recalling her presence of mind for her unfortunate sister's sake.

She obtained permission to speak alone with the patient, on condition that they both remained well within the nurse's view. There was no time for questions—there was only time for Miss Halcombe to impress on the unhappy lady the necessity of controlling herself, and to assure her of immediate help and rescue if she did so. The prospect of escaping from the Asylum by obedience to her sister's directions, was sufficient to quiet Lady Glyde, and to make her understand what was required of her. Miss Halcombe next returned to the nurse, placed all the gold she then had in her pocket (three sovereigns) in the nurse's hands, and asked when and where she could speak to her alone.

The woman was at first surprised and distrustful. But, on Miss Halcombe's declaring that she only wanted to put some questions which she was too much agitated to ask at that moment, and that she had no intention of misleading the nurse into any dereliction of duty, the woman took the money, and proposed three o'clock on the next day as the time for the interview. She might then slip out for half an hour, after the patients had dined; and she would meet the lady in a retired place, outside the high north wall which screened the grounds of the house. Miss Halcombe had only time to assent, and to whisper to her sister that she should hear from her on the next day, when the proprietor of the Asylum joined them. He noticed his visitor's agitation, which Miss Halcombe accounted for by saying that her interview with Anne Catherick had a little startled her, at first. She took her leave as soon after as possible—that is to say, as soon as she could summon courage to force herself from the presence of her unfortunate sister.

A very little reflection, when the capacity to reflect returned, convinced her that any attempt to identify Lady Glyde and to rescue her by legal means, would, even if successful, involve a delay that might be fatal to her sister's intellects, which were shaken already by the horror of the situation to which she had been consigned. By the time Miss Halcombe got back to London, she had determined to effect Lady Glyde's escape privately, by means of the nurse.

She went at once to her stockbroker; and sold out of the funds all the little property she possessed, amounting to rather less than seven hundred pounds. Determined, if necessary, to pay the price of her sister's liberty with every farthing she had in the world, she

repaired the next day, having the whole sum about her, in bank-notes, to her appointment outside the Asylum wall.

The nurse was there. Miss Halcombe approached the subject cautiously by many preliminary questions. She discovered, among other particulars, that the nurse who had, in former times, attended on the true Anne Catherick, had been held responsible (although she was not to blame for it) for the patient's escape, and had lost her place in consequence. The same penalty, it was added, would attach to the person then speaking to her, if the supposed Anne Catherick was missing a second time; and, moreover, the nurse, in this case, had an especial interest in keeping her place. She was engaged to be married; and she and her future husband were waiting till they could save, together, between two and three hundred pounds to start in business. The nurse's wages were good; and she might succeed, by strict economy, in contributing her small share towards the sum required in two years' time.

On this hint, Miss Halcombe spoke. She declared that the supposed Anne Catherick was nearly related to her; that she had been placed in the Asylum under a fatal mistake; and that the nurse would be doing a good and a Christian action in being the means of restoring them to one another. Before there was time to start a single objection, Miss Halcombe took four bank-notes of a hundred pounds each from her pocket-book, and offered them to the woman, as a compensation for the risk she was to run, and for the loss of her place.

The nurse hesitated, through sheer incredulity and surprise. Miss Halcombe pressed the point on her firmly.

'You will be doing a good action,' she repeated; 'you will be helping the most injured and unhappy woman alive. There is your marriage-portion for a reward. Bring her safely to me, here; and I will put these four bank-notes into your hand, before I claim her.'

'Will you give me a letter saying those words, which I can show to my sweetheart, when he asks how I got the money?' inquired the woman.

'I will bring the letter with me, ready written and signed,' answered Miss Halcombe.

'Then I'll risk it,' said the nurse.

'When?'

'To-morrow.'

It was hastily agreed between them that Miss Halcombe should return early the next morning, and wait out of sight, among the trees—always, however, keeping near the quiet spot of ground under the north wall. The nurse could fix no time for her appearance; caution requiring that she should wait, and be guided by circumstances. On that understanding they separated.

Miss Halcombe was at her place, with the promised letter, and the promised bank-notes, before ten the next morning. She waited more than an hour and a half. At the end of that time, the nurse came quickly round the corner of the wall, holding Lady Glyde by the arm. The moment they met, Miss Halcombe put the bank-notes and the letter into her hand—and the sisters were united again.

The nurse had dressed Lady Glyde, with excellent forethought, in a bonnet, veil, and shawl of her own. Miss Halcombe only detained her to suggest a means of turning the pursuit in a false direction, when the escape was discovered at the Asylum. She was to go back to the house; to mention in the hearing of the

other nurses that Anne Catherick had been inquiring latterly, about the distance from London to Hampshire; to wait till the last moment, before discovery was inevitable; and then to give the alarm that Anne was missing. The supposed inquiries about Hampshire, when communicated to the owner of the Asylum, would lead him to imagine that his patient had returned to Blackwater Park, under the influence of the delusion which made her persist in asserting herself to be Lady Glyde; and the first pursuit would, in all probability, be turned in that direction.

The nurse consented to follow these suggestions—the more readily, as they offered her the means of securing herself against any worse consequences than the loss of her place, by remaining in the Asylum, and so maintaining the appearance of innocence, at least. She at once returned to the house; and Miss Halcombe lost no time in taking her sister back with her to London. They caught the afternoon train to Carlisle the same afternoon, and arrived at Limmeridge, without accident or difficulty of any kind, that night.

During the latter part of their journey, they were alone in the carriage, and Miss Halcombe was able to collect such remembrances of the past as her sister's confused and weakened memory was able to recall. The terrible story of the conspiracy so obtained, was presented in fragments, sadly incoherent in themselves, and widely detached from each other. Imperfect as the revelation was, it must nevertheless be recorded here before this explanatory narrative closes with the events of the next day at Limmeridge House.

Lady Glyde's recollection of the events which followed her departure from Blackwater Park began with

her arrival at the London terminus of the South Western Railway. She had omitted to make a memorandum beforehand of the day on which she took the journey. All hope of fixing that important date, by any evidence of hers, or of Mrs. Michelson's, must be given up for lost.

On the arrival of the train at the platform, Lady Glyde found Count Fosco waiting for her. He was at the carriage door as soon as the porter could open it. The train was unusually crowded, and there was great confusion in getting the luggage. Some person whom Count Fosco brought with him procured the luggage which belonged to Lady Glyde. It was marked with her name. She drove away alone with the Count, in a vehicle which she did not particularly notice at the time.

Her first question, on leaving the terminus, referred to Miss Halcombe. The Count informed her that Miss Halcombe had not yet gone to Cumberland; after-consideration having caused him to doubt the prudence of her taking so long a journey without some days' previous rest.

Lady Glyde next inquired whether her sister was then staying in the Count's house. Her recollection of the answer was confused, her only distinct impression in relation to it being that the Count declared he was then taking her to see Miss Halcombe. Lady Glyde's experience of London was so limited, that she could not tell, at the time, through what streets they were driving. But they never left the streets, and they never passed any gardens or trees. When the carriage stopped, it stopped in a small street, behind a square—a square in which there were shops, and public buildings, and many people. From these recollections (of which Lady Glyde was certain) it seems quite clear

that Count Fosco did not take her to his own residence in the suburb of St. John's Wood.

They entered the house, and went up-stairs to a back room, either on the first or second floor. The luggage was carefully brought in. A female servant opened the door; and a man with a dark beard, apparently a foreigner, met them in the hall, and with great politeness showed them the way up-stairs. In answer to Lady Glyde's inquiries, the Count assured her that Miss Halcombe was in the house, and that she should be immediately informed of her sister's arrival. He and the foreigner then went away and left her by herself in the room. It was poorly furnished as a sitting-room, and it looked out on the backs of houses.

The place was remarkably quiet; no footsteps went up or down the stairs—she only heard in the room beneath her a dull, rumbling sound of men's voices talking. Before she had been long left alone, the Count returned, to explain that Miss Halcombe was then taking rest, and could not be disturbed for a little while. He was accompanied into the room by a gentleman (an Englishman) whom he begged to present as a friend of his.

After this singular introduction—in the course of which no names, to the best of Lady Glyde's recollection, had been mentioned—she was left alone with the stranger. He was perfectly civil; but he startled and confused her by some odd questions about herself, and by looking at her, while he asked them, in a strange manner. After remaining a short time, he went out; and a minute or two afterwards a second stranger—also an Englishman—came in. This person introduced himself as another friend of Count Fosco's; and he, in his turn, looked at her very oddly, and asked some

curious questions—never, as well as she could remember, addressing her by name; and going out again, after a little while, like the first man. By this time, she was so frightened about herself, and so uneasy about her sister, that she had thoughts of venturing down-stairs again, and claiming the protection and assistance of the only woman she had seen in the house—the servant who answered the door.

Just as she had risen from her chair, the Count came back into the room.

The moment he appeared, she asked anxiously how long the meeting between her sister and herself was to be still delayed. At first, he returned an evasive answer; but, on being pressed, he acknowledged with great apparent reluctance, that Miss Halcombe was by no means so well as he had hitherto represented her to be. His tone and manner, in making this reply, so alarmed Lady Glyde, or rather so painfully increased the uneasiness which she had felt in the company of the two strangers, that a sudden faintness overcame her, and she was obliged to ask for a glass of water. The Count called from the door for water, and for a bottle of smelling-salts. Both were brought in by the foreign-looking man with the beard. The water, when Lady Glyde attempted to drink it, had so strange a taste that it increased her faintness; and she hastily took the bottle of salts from Count Fosco, and smelt at it. Her head became giddy on the instant. The Count caught the bottle as it dropped out of her hand; and the last impression of which she was conscious was that he held it to her nostrils again.

From this point, her recollections were found to be confused, fragmentary, and difficult to reconcile with any reasonable probability.

Her own impression was that she recovered her senses later in the evening; that she then left the house; that she went (as she had previously arranged to go, at Blackwater Park) to Mrs. Vesey's; that she drank tea there; and that she passed the night under Mrs. Vesey's roof. She was totally unable to say how, or when, or in what company, she left the house to which Count Fosco had brought her. But she persisted in asserting that she had been to Mrs. Vesey's; and, still more extraordinary, that she had been helped to undress and get to bed by Mrs. Rubelle! She could not remember what the conversation was at Mrs. Vesey's, or whom she saw there besides that lady, or why Mrs. Rubelle should have been present in the house to help her.

Her recollection of what happened to her the next morning was still more vague and unreliable.

She had some dim idea of driving out (at what hour she could not say) with Count Fosco—and with Mrs. Rubelle, again, for a female attendant. But when, and why, she left Mrs. Vesey she could not tell; neither did she know what direction the carriage drove in, or where it set her down, or whether the Count and Mrs. Rubelle did or did not remain with her all the time she was out. At this point in her sad story there was a total blank. She had no impressions of the faintest kind to communicate—no idea whether one day, or more than one day, had passed—until she came to herself suddenly in a strange place, surrounded by women who were all unknown to her.

This was the Asylum. Here she first heard herself called by Anne Catherick's name; and here, as a last remarkable circumstance in the story of the conspiracy, her own eyes informed her that she had Anne Catherick's clothes on. The nurse, on the first night

in the Asylum, had shown her the marks on each article of her underclothing as it was taken off, and had said, not at all irritably or unkindly, 'Look at your own name on your own clothes, and don't worry us all any more about being Lady Glyde. She's dead and buried; and you're alive and hearty. Do look at your clothes now! There it is, in good marking ink; and there you will find it on all your old things, which we have kept in the house—Anne Catherick, as plain as print!' And there it was, when Miss Halcombe examined the linen her sister wore, on the night of their arrival at Limmeridge House.

These were the only recollections—all of them uncertain, and some of them contradictory—which could be extracted from Lady Glyde, by careful questioning, on the journey to Cumberland. Miss Halcombe abstained from pressing her with any inquiries relating to events in the Asylum: her mind being but too evidently unfit to bear the trial of reverting to them. It was known, by the voluntary admission of the owner of the madhouse, that she was received there on the twenty-seventh of July. From that date, until the fifteenth of October (the day of her rescue), she had been under restraint; her identity with Anne Catherick systematically asserted, and her sanity, from first to last, practically denied. Faculties less delicately balanced, constitutions less tenderly organised, must have suffered under such an ordeal as this. No man could have gone through it, and come out of it unchanged.

Arriving at Limmeridge late on the evening of the fifteenth, Miss Halcombe wisely resolved not to attempt the assertion of Lady Glyde's identity, until the next day.

The first thing in the morning, she went to Mr. Fairlie's room; and, using all possible cautions and preparations beforehand, at last told him, in so many words, what had happened. As soon as his first astonishment and alarm had subsided, he angrily declared that Miss Halcombe had allowed herself to be duped by Anne Catherick. He referred her to Count Fosco's letter, and to what she had herself told him of the personal resemblance between Anne and his deceased niece; and he positively declined to admit to his presence even for one minute only, a mad woman whom it was an insult and an outrage to have brought into his house at all.

Miss Halcombe left the room; waited till the first heat of her indignation had passed away; decided, on reflection, that Mr. Fairlie, should see his niece in the interests of common humanity, before he closed his doors on her as a stranger; and thereupon, without a word of previous warning, took Lady Glyde with her to his room. The servant was posted at the door to prevent their entrance; but Miss Halcombe insisted on passing him, and made her way into Mr. Fairlie's presence, leading her sister by the hand.

The scene that followed, though it only lasted for a few minutes, was too painful to be described—Miss Halcombe herself shrank from referring to it. Let it be enough to say that Mr. Fairlie declared, in the most positive terms, that he did not recognise the woman who had been brought into his room; that he saw nothing in her face and manner to make him doubt for a moment that his niece lay buried in Limmeridge churchyard; and that he would call on the law to protect him if before the day was over she was not removed from the house.

Taking the very worst view of Mr. Fairlie's selfish-

ness, indolence, and habitual want of feeling, it was manifestly impossible to suppose that he was capable of such infamy as secretly recognising and openly disowning his brother's child. Miss Halcombe humanely and sensibly allowed all due force to the influence of prejudice and alarm in preventing him from fairly exercising his perceptions; and accounted for what had happened, in that way. But when she next put the servants to the test, and found that they too were, in every case, uncertain, to say the least of it, whether the lady presented to them was their young mistress, or Anne Catherick, of whose resemblance to her they had all heard, the sad conclusion was inevitable, that the change produced in Lady Glyde's face and manner by her imprisonment in the Asylum, was far more serious than Miss Halcombe had at first supposed. The vile deception which had asserted her death, defied exposure even in the house where she was born, and among the people with whom she had lived.

In a less critical situation, the effort need not have been given up as hopeless, even yet.

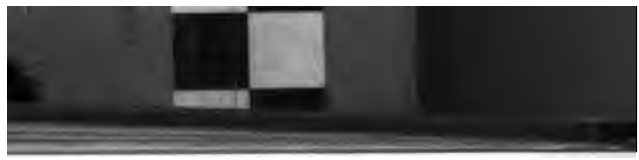
For example, the maid, Fanny, who happened to be then absent from Limmeridge, was expected back in two days; and there would be a chance of gaining her recognition to start with, seeing that she had been in much more constant communication with her mistress, and had been much more heartily attached to her than the other servants. Again, Lady Glyde might have been privately kept in the house, or in the village, to wait until her health was a little recovered, and her mind was a little steadied again. When her memory could be once more trusted to serve her, she would naturally refer to persons and events, in the past, with a certainty and a familiarity which no impostor could

simulate; and so the fact of her identity, which her own appearance had failed to establish, might subsequently be proved, with time to help her, by the surer test of her own words.

But the circumstances under which she had regained her freedom, rendered all recourse to such means as these simply impracticable. The pursuit from the Asylum, diverted to Hampshire for the time only, would infallibly next take the direction of Cumberland. The persons appointed to seek the fugitive, might arrive at Limmeridge House at a few hours' notice; and in Mr. Fairlie's present temper of mind, they might count on the immediate exertion of his local influence and authority to assist them. The commonest consideration for Lady Glyde's safety, forced on Miss Halcombe the necessity of resigning the struggle to do her justice, and of removing her at once from the place of all others that was now most dangerous to her—the neighbourhood of her own home.

An immediate return to London was the first and wisest measure of security which suggested itself. In the great city all traces of them might be most speedily and most surely effaced. There were no preparations to make—no farewell words of kindness to exchange with any one. On the afternoon of that memorable day of the sixteenth, Miss Halcombe roused her sister to a last exertion of courage; and, without a living soul to wish them well at parting, the two took their way into the world alone, and turned their backs for ever on Limmeridge House.

They had passed the hill above the churchyard, when Lady Glyde insisted on turning back to look her last at her mother's grave. Miss Halcombe tried to shake her resolution; but, in this one instance, tried in vain.



She was immovable. Her dim eyes lit with a sudden fire, and flashed through the veil that hung over them; her wasted fingers strengthened, moment by moment, round the friendly arm by which they had held so listlessly till this time. I believe in my soul that the Hand of God was pointing their way back to them; and that the most innocent and the most afflicted of His creatures was chosen, in that dread moment, to see it.

They retraced their steps to the burial-ground; and by that act sealed the future of our three lives.

III.

This was the story of the past—the story, so far as we knew it then.

Two obvious conclusions presented themselves to my mind, after hearing it. In the first place, I saw darkly what the nature of the conspiracy had been; how chances had been watched, and how circumstances had been handled to ensure impunity to a daring and an intricate crime. While all details were still a mystery to me, the vile manner in which the personal resemblance between the woman in white and Lady Glyde had been turned to account, was clear beyond a doubt. It was plain that Anne Catherick had been introduced into Count Fosco's house as Lady Glyde; it was plain that Lady Glyde had taken the dead woman's place in the Asylum—the substitution having been so managed as to make innocent people (the doctor and the two servants certainly; and the owner of the madhouse in all probability) accomplices in the crime.

The second conclusion came as the necessary consequence of the first. We three had no mercy to expect from Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde. The suc-

cess of the conspiracy had brought with it a clear gain to those two men of thirty thousand pounds—twenty thousand to one: ten thousand to the other, through his wife. They had that interest, as well as other interests, in ensuring their impunity from exposure; and they would leave no stone unturned, no sacrifice unattempted, no treachery untried, to discover the place in which their victim was concealed, and to part her from the only friends she had in the world. Marian Halcombe and myself.

The sense of this serious peril—a peril which every day and every hour might bring nearer and nearer to us—was the one influence that guided me in fixing the place of our retreat. I chose it in the far East of London, where there were fewest idle people to lounge and look about them in the streets. I chose it in a poor and a populous neighbourhood—because the harder the struggle for existence among the men and women about us, the less the risk of their having the time or taking the pains to notice chance strangers who came among them. These were the great advantages I looked to; but our locality was a gain to us also, in another and a hardly less important respect. We could live cheaply by the daily work of my hands; and could save every farthing we possessed to forward the purpose—the righteous purpose of redressing an infamous wrong—which, from first to last, I now kept steadily in view.

In a week's time, Marian Halcombe and I had settled how the course of our new lives should be directed.

There were no other lodgers in the house; and we had the means of going in and out without passing through the shop. I arranged, for the present at least,

that neither Marian nor Laura should stir outside the door without my being with them; and that, in my absence from home, they should let no one into their rooms on any pretence whatever. This rule established, I went to a friend whom I had known in former days—a wood engraver, in large practice—to seek for employment; telling him, at the same time, that I had reasons for wishing to remain unknown.

He at once concluded that I was in debt; expressed his regret in the usual forms; and then promised to do what he could to assist me. I left his false impression undisturbed; and accepted the work he had to give. He knew that he could trust my experience and my industry. I had, what he wanted, steadiness and facility; and though my earnings were but small, they sufficed for our necessities. As soon as we could feel certain of this, Miss Halcombe and I put together what we possessed. She had between two and three hundred pounds left of her own property; and I had nearly as much remaining from the purchase-money obtained by the sale of my drawing-master's practice before I left England. Together we made up between us more than four hundred pounds. I deposited this little fortune in a bank, to be kept for the expense of those secret inquiries and investigations which I was determined to set on foot, and to carry on by myself if I could find no one to help me. We calculated our weekly expenditure to the last farthing; and we never touched our little fund, except in Laura's interests and for Laura's sake.

The house-work, which, if we had dared trust a stranger near us, would have been done by a servant, was taken on the first day, taken as her own right, by Marian Halcombe. 'What a woman's hands *are* fit for,' she said, 'early and late, these hands of mine shall

do.' They trembled as she held them out. The wasted arms told their sad story of the past, as she turned up the sleeves of the poor plain dress that she wore for safety's sake; but the unquenchable spirit of the woman burnt bright in her even yet. I saw the big tears rise thick in her eyes, and fall slowly over her cheeks as she looked at me. She dashed them away with a touch of her old energy, and smiled with a faint reflection of her old good spirits. 'Don't doubt my courage, Walter,' she pleaded, 'it's my weakness that cries, not *me*. The house-work shall conquer it, if *I* can't.' And she kept her word—the victory was won when we met in the evening, and she sat down to rest. Her large steady black eyes looked at me with a flash of their bright firmness of bygone days. 'I am not quite broken down yet,' she said; 'I am worth trusting with my share of the work.' Before I could answer, she added in a whisper, 'And worth trusting with my share in the risk and the danger too. Remember that, if the time comes!'

I did remember it, when the time came.

As early as the end of October, the daily course of our lives had assumed its settled direction; and we three were as completely isolated in our place of concealment, as if the house we lived in had been a desert island, and the great network of streets and the thousands of our fellow creatures all round us the waters of an illimitable sea. I could now reckon on some leisure time for considering what my future plan of action should be, and how I might arm myself most securely, at the outset, for the coming struggle with Sir Percival and the Count.

I gave up all hope of appealing to my recognition of

Laura, or to Marian's recognition of her, in proof of her identity. If we had loved her less dearly, if the instinct implanted in us by that love had not been far more certain than any exercise of reasoning, far keener than any process of observation, even we might have hesitated, on first seeing her.

The outward changes wrought by the suffering and the terror of the past had fearfully, almost hopelessly, strengthened the fatal resemblance between Anne Catherick and herself. In my narrative of events at the time of my residence in Limmeridge House, I have recorded, from my own observation of the two, how the likeness, striking as it was when viewed generally, failed in many important points of similarity when tested in detail. In those former days, if they had both been seen together, side by side, no person could for a moment have mistaken them one for the other—as has happened often in the instances of twins. I could not say this now. The sorrow and suffering which I had once blamed myself for associating even by a passing thought with the future of Laura Fairlie, *had* set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of her face; and the fatal resemblance which I had once seen and shuddered at seeing, in idea only, was now a real and living resemblance which asserted itself before my own eyes. Strangers, acquaintances, friends even who could not look at her as we looked, if she had been shown to them in the first days of her rescue from the Asylum, might have doubted if she were the Laura Fairlie they had once seen, and doubted without blame.

The one remaining chance, which I had at first thought might be trusted to serve us—the chance of appealing to her recollection of persons and events

with which no impostor could be familiar, was proved, by the sad test of our later experience, to be hopeless. Every little caution that Marian and I practised towards her; every little remedy we tried, to strengthen and steady slowly the weakened, shaken faculties, was a fresh protest in itself against the risk of turning her mind back on the troubled and the terrible past.

The only events of former days which we ventured on encouraging her to recall, were the little trivial domestic events of that happy time at Limmeridge, when I first went there, and taught her to draw. The day when I roused those remembrances by showing her the sketch of the summerhouse which she had given me on the morning of our farewell, and which had never been separated from me since, was the birthday of our first hope. Tenderly and gradually, the memory of the old walks and drives dawned upon her; and the poor weary pining eyes, looked at Marian and at me with a new interest, with a faltering thoughtfulness in them, which, from that moment, we cherished and kept alive. I bought her a little box of colours, and a sketch-book like the old sketch-book which I had seen in her hands on the morning when we first met. Once again—oh me, once again!—at spare hours saved from my work, in the dull London light, in the poor London room, I sat by her side, to guide the faltering touch, to help the feeble hand. Day by day, I raised and raised the new interest till its place in the blank of her existence was at last assured—till she could think of her drawing, and talk of it, and patiently practise it by herself, with some faint reflection of the innocent pleasure in my encouragement, the growing enjoyment in her own progress, which belonged to the lost life and the lost happiness of past days.

We helped her mind slowly by this simple means; we took her out between us to walk, on fine days, in a quiet old City square, near at hand, where there was nothing to confuse or alarm her; we spared a few pounds from the fund at the banker's to get her wine, and the delicate strengthening food that she required; we amused her in the evenings with children's games at cards, with scrap-books full of prints which I borrowed from the engraver who employed me—by these, and other trifling attentions like them, we composed her and steadied her, and hoped all things, as cheerfully as we could, from time and care, and love that never neglected and never despaired of her. But to take her mercilessly from seclusion and repose; to confront her with strangers, or with acquaintances who were little better than strangers; to rouse the painful impressions of her past life which we had so carefully hushed to rest—this, even in her own interests, we dared not do. Whatever sacrifices it cost, whatever long, weary, heart-breaking delays it involved, the wrong that had been inflicted on her, if mortal means could grapple it, must be redressed without her knowledge and without her help.

This resolution settled, it was next necessary to decide how the first risk should be ventured, and what the first proceedings should be.

After consulting with Marian, I resolved to begin by gathering together as many facts as could be collected—then, to ask the advice of Mr. Kyrle (whom we knew we could trust); and to ascertain from him, in the first instance, if the legal remedy lay fairly within our reach. I owed it to Laura's interests not to stake her whole future on my own unaided exertions, so long as there was the faintest prospect of strengthen-

ing our position by obtaining reliable assistance of any kind.

The first source of information to which I applied, was the journal kept at Blackwater Park by Marian Halcombe. There were passages in this diary, relating to myself, which she thought it best that I should not see. Accordingly, she read to me from the manuscript, and I took the notes I wanted as she went on. We could only find time to pursue this occupation by sitting up late at night. Three nights were devoted to the purpose, and were enough to put me in possession of all that Marian could tell.

My next proceeding was to gain as much additional evidence as I could procure from other people, without exciting suspicion. I went myself to Mrs. Vesey to ascertain if Laura's impression of having slept there, was correct or not. In this case, from consideration for Mrs. Vesey's age and infirmity, and in all subsequent cases of the same kind from considerations of caution, I kept our real position a secret, and was always careful to speak of Laura as 'the late Lady Glyde.'

Mrs. Vesey's answer to my inquiries only confirmed the apprehensions which I had previously felt. Laura had certainly written to say she would pass the night under the roof of her old friend—but she had never been near the house.

Her mind in this instance, and, as I feared, in other instances besides, confusedly presented to her something which she had only intended to do in the false light of something which she had really done. The unconscious contradiction of herself was easy to account for in this way—but it was likely to lead to serious results. It was a stumble on the threshold at starting; it was a flaw in the evidence which told fatally against us.

When I next asked for the letter which Laura had written to Mrs. Vesey from Blackwater Park, it was given to me without the envelope, which had been thrown into the wastepaper basket, and long since destroyed. In the letter itself, no date was mentioned—not even the day of the week. It only contained these lines:—'Dearest Mrs. Vesey, I am in sad distress and anxiety, and I may come to your house to-morrow night, and ask for a bed. I can't tell you what is the matter in this letter—I write it in such fear of being found out that I can fix my mind on nothing. Pray be at home to see me. I will give you a thousand kisses, and tell you everything. Your affectionate Laura.' What help was there in those lines? None.

On returning from Mrs. Vesey's I instructed Marian to write (observing the same caution which I practised myself) to Mrs. Michelson. She was to express, if she pleased, some general suspicion of Count Fosco's conduct; and she was to ask the housekeeper to supply us with a plain statement of events, in the interests of truth. While we were waiting for the answer, which reached us in a week's time, I went to the doctor in St. John's Wood; introducing myself as sent by Miss Halcombe, to collect, if possible, more particulars of her sister's last illness than Mr. Kyrle had found the time to procure. By Mr. Goodricke's assistance, I obtained a copy of the certificate of death, and an interview with the woman (Jane Gould) who had been employed to prepare the body for the grave. Through this person, I also discovered a means of communicating with the servant, Hester Pinhorn. She had recently left her place, in consequence of a disagreement with her mistress; and she was lodging with some people in the neighbourhood whom Mrs. Gould knew. In the man-

ner here indicated, I obtained the Narratives of the housekeeper, of the doctor, of Jane Gould, and of Hester Pinhorn, exactly as they are presented in these pages.

Furnished with such additional evidence as these documents afforded, I considered myself to be sufficiently prepared for a consultation with Mr. Kyrle; and Marian wrote accordingly to mention my name to him, and to specify the day and hour at which I requested to see him on private business.

There was time enough, in the morning, for me to take Laura out for her walk as usual, and to see her quietly settled at her drawing afterwards. She looked up at me with a new anxiety in her face, as I rose to leave the room; and her fingers began to toy doubtfully, in the old way, with the brushes and pencils on the table.

'You are not tired of me yet?' she said. 'You are not going away because you are tired of me? I will try to do better—I will try to get well. Are you as fond of me, Walter, as you used to be, now I am so pale and thin, and so slow in learning to draw?'

She spoke as a child might have spoken; she showed me her thoughts as a child might have shown them. I waited a few minutes longer—waited to tell her that she was dearer to me now than she had ever been in the past times. 'Try to get well again,' I said, encouraging the new hope in the future which I saw dawning in her mind; 'try to get well again, for Marian's sake and for mine.'

'Yes,' she said to herself, returning to her drawing. 'I must try because they are both so fond of me.' She suddenly looked up again. 'Don't be gone long! I can't get on with my drawing, Walter, when you are not here to help me.'

'I shall soon be back, my darling—soon be back to see how you are getting on.'

My voice faltered a little in spite of me. I forced myself from the room. It was no time, then, for parting with the self-control which might yet serve me in my need before the day was out.

As I opened the door, I beckoned to Marian to follow me to the stairs. It was necessary to prepare her for a result which I felt might sooner or later follow my showing myself openly in the streets.

'I shall, in all probability, be back in a few hours,' I said; 'and you will take care, as usual, to let no one inside the doors in my absence. But if anything happens——'

'What can happen?' she interposed, quickly. 'Tell me plainly, Walter, if there is any danger—and I shall know how to meet it.'

'The only danger,' I replied, 'is that Sir Percival Glyde may have been recalled to London by the news of Laura's escape. You are aware that he had me watched before I left England; and that he probably knows me by sight, although I don't know him?'

She laid her hand on my shoulder, and looked at me in anxious silence. I saw she understood the serious risk that threatened us.

'It is not likely,' I said, 'that I shall be seen in London again so soon, either by Sir Percival himself or by the persons in his employ. But it is barely possible that an accident may happen. In that case, you will not be alarmed if I fail to return to-night; and you will satisfy any inquiry of Laura's with the best excuse that you can make for me? If I find the least reason to suspect that I am watched, I will take good care that no spy follows me back to this house. Don't

doubt my return, Marian, however it may be delayed—and fear nothing.'

'Nothing!' she answered, firmly. 'You shall not regret, Walter, that you have only a woman to help you.' She paused, and detained me for a moment longer. 'Take care!' she said, pressing my hand anxiously—'take care!'

I left her; and set forth to pave the way for discovery—the dark and doubtful way, which began at the lawyer's door.

IV.

No circumstance of the slightest importance happened on my way to the offices of Messrs. Gilmore and Kyrle, in Chancery Lane.

While my card was being taken in to Mr. Kyrle, a consideration occurred to me which I deeply regretted not having thought of before. The information derived from Marian's diary made it a matter of certainty that Count Fosco had opened her first letter from Blackwater Park to Mr. Kyrle, and had, by means of his wife, intercepted the second. He was therefore well aware of the address of the office; and he would naturally infer that if Marian wanted advice and assistance, after Laura's escape from the Asylum, she would apply once more to the experience of Mr. Kyrle. In this case, the office in Chancery Lane was the very first place which he and Sir Percival would cause to be watched; and, if the same persons were chosen for the purpose who had been employed to follow me, before my departure from England, the fact of my return would in all probability be ascertained on that very day. I had thought, generally, of the chances of my being recog-

nised in the streets; but the special risk connected with the office had never occurred to me until the present moment. It was too late now to repair this unfortunate error in judgment—too late to wish that I had made arrangements for meeting the lawyer in some place privately appointed beforehand. I could only resolve to be cautious on leaving Chancery Lane, and not to go straight home again under any circumstances whatever.

After waiting a few minutes, I was shown into Mr. Kyrle's private room. He was a pale, thin, quiet, self-possessed man, with a very attentive eye, a very low voice, and a very undemonstrative manner; not (as I judged) ready with his sympathy, where strangers were concerned; and not at all easy to disturb in his professional composure. A better man for my purpose could hardly have been found. If he committed himself to a decision at all, and if the decision was favourable, the strength of our case was as good as proved from that moment.

'Before I enter on the business which brings me here,' I said, 'I ought to warn you, Mr. Kyrle, that the shortest statement I can make of it may occupy some little time.'

'My time is at Miss Halcombe's disposal,' he replied. 'Where any interests of hers are concerned, I represent my partner personally, as well as professionally. It was his request that I should do so, when he ceased to take active part in business.'

'May I inquire whether Mr. Gilmore is in England?'

'He is not: he is living with his relatives in Germany. His health has improved, but the period of his return is still uncertain.'

While we were exchanging these few preliminary words, he had been searching among the papers before him, and he now produced from them a sealed letter. I

thought he was about to hand the letter to me; but, apparently changing his mind, he placed it by itself on the table, settled himself in his chair, and silently waited to hear what I had to say.

Without wasting a moment in prefatory words of any sort, I entered on my narrative, and put him in full possession of the events which have already been related in these pages.

Lawyer as he was to the very marrow of his bones, I startled him out of his professional composure. Expressions of incredulity and surprise, which he could not repress, interrupted me several times, before I had done. I persevered, however, to the end, and, as soon as I reached it, boldly asked the one important question:

'What is your opinion, Mr. Kyrle?'

He was too cautious to commit himself to an answer, without taking time to recover his self-possession first.

'Before I give my opinion,' he said, 'I must beg permission to clear the ground by a few questions.'

He put the questions—sharp, suspicious, unbelieving questions, which clearly showed me, as they proceeded, that he thought I was the victim of a delusion; and that he might even have doubted, but for my introduction to him by Miss Halcombe, whether I was not attempting the perpetration of a cunningly-designed fraud.

'Do you believe that I have spoken the truth, Mr. Kyrle?' I asked, when he had done examining me.

'So far as your own convictions are concerned, I am certain you have spoken the truth,' he replied. 'I have the highest esteem for Miss Halcombe, and I have therefore every reason to respect a gentleman whose mediation she trusts in a matter of this kind. I will even go farther, if you like, and admit, for courtesy's

sake and for argument's sake, that the identity of Lady Glyde, as a living person, is a proved fact to Miss Halcombe and yourself. But you come to me for a legal opinion. As a lawyer, and as a lawyer only, it is my duty to tell you, Mr. Hartright, that you have not the shadow of a case.'

'You put it strongly, Mr. Kyrle.'

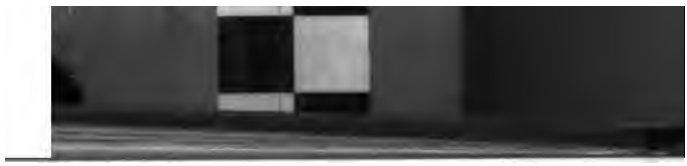
'I will try to put it plainly as well. The evidence of Lady Glyde's death is, on the face of it, clear and satisfactory. There is her aunt's testimony to prove that she came to Count Fosco's house, that she fell ill, and that she died. There is the testimony of the medical certificate to prove the death, and to show that it took place under natural circumstances. There is the fact of the funeral at Limmeridge, and there is the assertion of the inscription on the tomb. That is the case you want to overthrow. What evidence have you to support the declaration on your side that the person who died and was buried was not Lady Glyde? Let us run through the main points of your statement and see what they are worth. Miss Halcombe goes to a certain private Asylum, and there sees a certain female patient. It is known that a woman named Anne Catherick, and bearing an extraordinary personal resemblance to Lady Glyde, escaped from the Asylum; it is known that the person received there last July, was received as Anne Catherick brought back; it is known that the gentleman who brought her back warned Mr. Fairlie that it was part of her insanity to be bent on personating his dead niece; and it is known that she did repeatedly declare herself, in the Asylum (where no one believed her), to be Lady Glyde. These are all facts. What have you to set against them? Miss Halcombe's recognition of the woman, which recognition after-events

invalidate or contradict. Does Miss Halcombe assert her supposed sister's identity to the owner of the Asylum, and take legal means for rescuing her? No: she secretly bribes a nurse to let her escape. When the patient has been released in this doubtful manner, and is taken to Mr. Fairlie, does he recognise her? is he staggered for one instant in his belief of his niece's death? No. Do the servants recognise her? No. Is she kept in the neighbourhood to assert her own identity, and to stand the test of further proceedings? No: she is privately taken to London. In the mean time, you have recognised her also—but you are not a relative; you are not even an old friend of the family. The servants contradict you; and Mr. Fairlie contradicts Miss Halcombe; and the supposed Lady Glyde contradicts herself. She declares she passed the night in London at a certain house. Your own evidence shows that she has never been near that house; and your own admission is, that her condition of mind prevents you from producing her anywhere to submit to investigation, and to speak for herself. I pass over minor points of evidence, on both sides, to save time; and I ask you, if this case were to go now into a court of law—to go before a jury, bound to take facts as they reasonably appear—where are your proofs?'

I was obliged to wait and collect myself before I could answer him. It was the first time the story of Laura and the story of Marian had been presented to me from a stranger's point of view—the first time the terrible obstacles that lay across our path had been made to show themselves in their true character.

'There can be no doubt,' I said, 'that the facts, as you have stated them, appear to tell against us; but——'

'But you think those facts can be explained away,'



interposed Mr. Kyrle. 'Let me tell you the result of my experience on that point. When an English jury has to choose between a plain fact, *on* the surface, and a long explanation *under* the surface, it always takes the fact, in preference to the explanation. For example, Lady Glyde (I call the lady you represent by that name for argument's sake) declares she has slept at a certain house, and it is proved that she has not slept at that house. You explain this circumstance by entering into the state of her mind, and deducing from it a metaphysical conclusion. I don't say the conclusion is wrong—I only say that the jury will take the fact of her contradicting herself, in preference to any reason for the contradiction that you can offer.'

'But is it not possible,' I urged, 'by dint of patience and exertion, to discover additional evidence? Miss Halcombe and I have a few hundred pounds——'

He looked at me with a half-suppressed pity, and shook his head.

'Consider the subject, Mr. Hartright, from your own point of view,' he said. 'If you are right about Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco (which I don't admit, mind), every imaginable difficulty would be thrown in the way of your getting fresh evidence. Every obstacle of litigation would be raised; every point in the case would be systematically contested—and by the time we had spent our thousands, instead of our hundreds, the final result would, in all probability, be against us. Questions of identity, where instances of personal resemblance are concerned, are, in themselves, the hardest of all questions to settle—the hardest, even when they are free from the complications which beset the case we are now discussing. I really see no prospect of throwing any light whatever on this extraordinary

affair. Even if the person buried in Limmeridge churchyard be not Lady Glyde, she was, in life, on your own showing, so like her, that we should gain nothing, if we applied for the necessary authority to have the body exhumed. In short, there is no case, Mr. Hartright—there is really no case.'

I was determined to believe that there *was* a case; and, in that determination, shifted my ground, and appealed to him once more.

'Are there not other proofs that we might produce, besides the proof of identity?' I asked.

'Not as you are situated,' he replied. 'The simplest and surest of all proofs, the proof by comparison of dates, is, as I understand, altogether out of your reach. If you could show a discrepancy between the date of the doctor's certificate and the date of Lady Glyde's journey to London, the matter would wear a totally different aspect; and I should be the first to say, Let us go on.'

'That date may yet be recovered, Mr. Kyrle.'

'On the day when it *is* recovered, Mr. Hartright, you will have a case. If you have any prospect, at this moment, of getting at it—tell me, and we shall see if I can advise you.'

I considered. The housekeeper could not help us; Laura could not help us; Marian could not help us. In all probability, the only persons in existence who knew the date were Sir Percival and the Count.

'I can think of no means of ascertaining the date at present,' I said, 'because I can think of no persons who are sure to know it, but Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde.'

Mr. Kyrle's calmly attentive face relaxed, for the first time, into a smile.

'With your opinion of the conduct of those two gentlemen,' he said, 'you don't expect help in that quarter, I presume? If they have combined to gain large sums of money by a conspiracy, they are not likely to confess it, at any rate.'

'They may be forced to confess it, Mr. Kyrle.'

'By whom?'

'By me.'

We both rose. He looked me attentively in the face with more appearance of interest than he had shown yet. I could see that I had perplexed him a little.

'You are very determined,' he said. 'You have, no doubt, a personal motive for proceeding, into which it is not my business to inquire. If a case can be produced in the future, I can only say, my best assistance is at your service. At the same time, I must warn you, as the money question always enters into the law question, that I see little hope, even if you ultimately established the fact of Lady Glyde's being alive, of recovering her fortune. The foreigner would probably leave the country, before proceedings were commenced; and Sir Percival's embarrassments are numerous enough and pressing enough to transfer almost any sum of money he may possess from himself to his creditors. You are, of course, aware——'

I stopped him at that point.

'Let me beg that we may not discuss Lady Glyde's affairs,' I said. 'I have never known anything about them, in former times; and I know nothing of them now—except that her fortune is lost. You are right in assuming that I have personal motives for stirring in this matter. I wish those motives to be always as disinterested as they are at the present moment——'

He tried to interpose and explain. I was a little

heated, I suppose, by feeling that he had doubted me; and I went on bluntly, without waiting to hear him.

'There shall be no money-motive,' I said, 'no idea of personal advantage, in the service I mean to render to Lady Glyde. She has been cast out as a stranger from the house in which she was born—a lie which records her death has been written on her mother's tomb—and there are two men, alive and unpunished, who are responsible for it. That house shall open again to receive her, in the presence of every soul who followed the false funeral to the grave; that lie shall be publicly erased from the tombstone, by the authority of the head of the family; and those two men shall answer for their crime to ME, though the justice that sits in tribunals is powerless to pursue them. I have given my life to that purpose; and, alone as I stand, if God spares me, I will accomplish it.'

He drew back towards his table, and said nothing. His face showed plainly that he thought my delusion had got the better of my reason, and that he considered it totally useless to give me any more advice.

'We each keep our opinion, Mr. Kyrle,' I said; 'and we must wait till the events of the future decide between us. In the mean time, I am much obliged to you for the attention you have given to my statement. You have shown me that the legal remedy lies, in every sense of the word, beyond our means. We cannot produce the law-proof; and we are not rich enough to pay the law-expenses. It is something gained to know that.'

I bowed and walked to the door. He called me back, and gave me the letter which I had seen him place on the table by itself at the beginning of our interview.

'This came by post, a few days ago,' he said. 'Perhaps you will not mind delivering it? Pray tell Miss

Halcombe, at the same time, that I sincerely regret being, thus far, unable to help her—except by advice, which will not be more welcome, I am afraid, to her than to you.'

I looked at the letter while he was speaking. It was addressed to 'Miss Halcombe. Care of Messrs. Gilmore and Kyrle, Chancery Lane.' The handwriting was quite unknown to me.

On leaving the room, I asked one last question.

'Do you happen to know,' I said, 'if Sir Percival Glyde is still in Paris?'

'He has returned to London,' replied Mr. Kyrle. 'At least I heard so from his solicitor, whom I met yesterday.'

After that answer I went out.

On leaving the office, the first precaution to be observed was to abstain from attracting attention by stopping to look about me. I walked towards one of the quietest of the large squares on the north of Holborn—then suddenly stopped, and turned round at a place where a long stretch of pavement was left behind me.

There were two men at the corner of the square who had stopped also, and who were standing talking together. After a moment's reflection, I turned back so as to pass them. One moved, as I came near, and turned the corner leading from the square into the street. The other remained stationary. I looked at him as I passed, and instantly recognized one of the men who had watched me before I left England.

If I had been free to follow my own instincts, I should probably have begun by speaking to the man, and have ended by knocking him down. But I was bound to consider consequences. If I once placed myself pub-

licly in the wrong, I put the weapons at once into Sir Percival's hands. There was no choice but to oppose cunning by cunning. I turned into the street down which the second man had disappeared, and passed him, waiting in a doorway. He was a stranger to me; and I was glad to make sure of his personal appearance, in case of future annoyance. Having done this, I again walked northward, till I reached the New Road. There, I turned aside to the west (having the men behind me all the time), and waited at a point where I knew myself to be at some distance from a cabstand, until a fast two-wheel cab, empty, should happen to pass. One passed in a few minutes. I jumped in, and told the man to drive rapidly towards Hyde Park. There was no second fast cab for the spies behind me. I saw them dart across to the other side of the road, to follow me by running, until a cab or cabstand, came in their way. But I had the start of them; and when I stopped the driver, and got out, they were nowhere in sight. I crossed Hyde Park, and made sure, on the open ground, that I was free. When I at last turned my steps homewards, it was not till many hours later—not till after dark.

I found Marian waiting for me, alone in the little sitting-room. She had persuaded Laura to go to rest, after first promising to show me her drawing, the moment I came in. The poor little dim faint sketch—so trifling in itself, so touching in its associations—was propped up carefully on the table with two books, and was placed where the faint light of the one candle we allowed ourselves might fall on it to the best advantage. I sat down to look at the drawing, and to tell Marian, in whispers, what had happened. The partition which

divided us from the next room was so thin that we could almost hear Laura's breathing, and we might have disturbed her if we had spoken aloud.

Marian preserved her composure while I described my interview with Mr. Kyrle. But her face became troubled when I spoke next of the men who had followed me from the lawyer's office, and when I told her of the discovery of Sir Percival's return.

'Bad news, Walter,' she said; 'the worst news you could bring. Have you nothing more to tell me?'

'I have something to give you,' I replied, handing her the note which Mr. Kyrle had confided to my care.

She looked at the address, and recognised the handwriting instantly.

'You know your correspondent?' I said.

'Too well,' she answered. 'My correspondent is Count Fosco.'

With that reply she opened the note. Her face flushed deeply while she read it—her eyes brightened with anger, as she handed it to me to read in my turn.

The note contained these lines:

'Impelled by honourable admiration—honourable to myself, honourable to you—I write, magnificent Marian, in the interests of your tranquillity, to say two consoling words:

'Fear nothing!

'Exercise your fine natural sense, and remain in retirement. Dear and admirable woman, invite no dangerous publicity. Resignation is sublime—adopt it. The modest repose of home is eternally fresh—enjoy it. The storms of life pass harmless over the valley of Seclusion—dwell, dear lady, in the valley.

'Do this; and I authorise you to fear nothing. No

new calamity shall lacerate your sensibilities—sensibilities precious to me as my own. You shall not be molested; the fair companion of your retreat shall not be pursued. She has found a new asylum, in your heart. Priceless asylum!—I envy her, and leave her there.

'One last word of affectionate warning, of paternal caution—and I tear myself from the charm of addressing you; I close these fervent lines.

'Advance no further than you have gone already; compromise no serious interests; threaten nobody. Do not, I implore you, force me into action—ME, the Man of Action—when it is the cherished object of my ambition to be passive, to restrict the vast reach of my energies and my combinations, for your sake. If you have rash friends, moderate their deplorable ardour. If Mr. Hartright returns to England, hold no communication with him. I walk on a path of my own; and Percival follows at my heels. On the day when Mr. Hartright crosses that path, he is a lost man.'

The only signature to these lines was the initial letter F, surrounded by a circle of intricate flourishes. I threw the letter on the table, with all the contempt that I felt for it.

'He is trying to frighten you—a sure sign that he is frightened himself,' I said.

She was too genuine a woman to treat the letter as I treated it. The insolent familiarity of the language was too much for her self-control. As she looked at me across the table, her hands clenched themselves in her lap, and the old quick fiery temper flamed out again, brightly, in her cheeks and her eyes.

'Walter!' she said, 'if ever those two men are at

your mercy, and if you are obliged to spare one of them—don't let it be the Count.'

'I will keep his letter, Marian, to help my memory when the time comes.'

She looked at me attentively as I put the letter away in my pocket-book.

'When the time comes?' she repeated. 'Can you speak of the future as if you were certain of it?—certain after what you have heard in Mr. Kyrle's office, after what has happened to you to-day?'

'I don't count the time from to-day, Marian. All I have done to-day, is to ask another man to act for me. I count from to-morrow——'

'Why from to-morrow?'

'Because to-morrow I mean to act for myself.'

'How?'

'I shall go to Blackwater by the first train; and return, I hope, at night.'

'To Blackwater!'

'Yes. I have had time to think, since I left Mr. Kyrle. His opinion on one point, confirms my own. We must persist, to the last, in hunting down the date of Laura's journey. The one weak point in the conspiracy, and probably the one chance of proving that she is a living woman, centre in the discovery of that date.'

'You mean,' said Marian, 'the discovery that Laura did not leave Blackwater Park till *after* the date of her death on the doctor's certificate?'

'Certainly.'

'What makes you think it might have been *after?* Laura can tell us nothing of the time she was in London.'

'But the owner of the Asylum told you that she was

received there on the twenty-seventh of July. I doubt Count Fosco's ability to keep her in London, and to keep her insensible to all that was passing around her, more than one night. In that case, she must have started on the twenty-sixth, and must have come to London one day after the date of her own death on the doctor's certificate. If we can prove that date, we prove our case against Sir Percival and the Count.'

'Yes, yes—I see! But how is the proof to be obtained?'

'Mrs. Michelson's narrative has suggested to me two ways of trying to obtain it. One of them is to question the Doctor, Mr. Dawson—who must know when he resumed his attendance at Blackwater Park, after Laura left the house. The other is, to make inquiries at the inn to which Sir Percival drove away by himself, at night. We know that his departure followed Laura's, after the lapse of a few hours; and we may get at the date in that way. The attempt is at least worth making—and, to-morrow, I am determined it shall be made.'

'And suppose it fails—I look at the worst, now, Walter; but I will look at the best, if disappointments come to try us—suppose no one can help you at Blackwater?'

'There are two men who can help me, and shall help me, in London—Sir Percival and the Count. Innocent people may well forget the date; but *they* are guilty, and *they* know it. If I fail everywhere else, I mean to force a confession out of one or both of them, on my own terms.'

All the woman flushed up in Marian's face as I spoke.

'Begin with the Count!' she whispered eagerly. 'For my sake, begin with the Count.'

'We must begin, for Laura's sake, where there is the best chance of success,' I replied.

The colour faded from her face again, and she shook her head sadly.

'Yes,' she said, 'you are right—it was mean and miserable of me to say that. I try to be patient, Walter, and succeed better now than I did in happier times. But I have a little of my old temper still left—and it *will* get the better of me when I think of the Count!'

'His turn will come,' I said. 'But, remember, there is no weak place in his life that we know of, yet.' I waited a little to let her recover her self-possession; and then spoke the decisive words:

'Marian! There is a weak place we both know of in Sir Percival's life——'

'You mean the secret!'

'Yes: the Secret. It is our only sure hold on him. I can force him from his position of security, I can drag him and his villany into the face of day, by no other means. Whatever the Count may have done, Sir Percival has consented to the conspiracy against Laura from another motive besides the motive of gain. You heard him tell the Count that he believed his wife knew enough to ruin him? You heard him say that he was a lost man if the secret of Anne Catherick was known?'

'Yes! yes! I did.'

'Well, Marian, when our other resources have failed us, I mean to know the secret. My old superstition clings to me, even yet. I say again the woman in white is a living influence in our three lives. The End is appointed; the End is drawing us on—and Anne Catherick, dead in her grave, points the way to it still!'

V.

The story of my first inquiries in Hampshire is soon told.

My early departure from London enabled me to reach Mr. Dawson's house in the forenoon. Our interview, so far as the object of my visit was concerned, led to no satisfactory result.

Mr. Dawson's books certainly showed when he had resumed his attendance on Miss Halcombe, at Blackwater Park, but it was not possible to calculate back from this date with any exactness, without such help from Mrs. Michelson as I knew she was unable to afford. She could not say from memory (who, in similar cases, ever can?) how many days had elapsed between the renewal of the doctor's attendance on his patient and the previous departure of Lady Glyde. She was almost certain of having mentioned the circumstance of the departure to Miss Halcombe, on the day after it happened—but then she was no more able to fix the date of the day on which this disclosure took place, than to fix the date of the day before, when Lady Glyde had left for London. Neither could she calculate, with any nearer approach to exactness, the time that had passed from the departure of her mistress, to the period when the undated letter from Madame Fosco arrived. Lastly, as if to complete the series of difficulties, the doctor himself, having been ill at the time, had omitted to make his usual entry of the day of the week and month when the gardener from Blackwater Park had called on him to deliver Mrs. Michelson's message.

Hopeless of obtaining assistance from Mr. Dawson,

I resolved to try next if I could establish the date of Sir Percival's arrival at Knowlesbury.

It seemed like a fatality! When I reached Knowlesbury the inn was shut up; and bills were posted on the walls. The speculation had been a bad one, as I was informed, ever since the time of the railway. The new hotel at the station had gradually absorbed the business; and the old inn (which we knew to be the inn at which Sir Percival had put up) had been closed about two months since. The proprietor had left the town with all his goods and chattels, and where he had gone, I could not positively ascertain from any one. The four people of whom I inquired gave me four different accounts of his plans and projects when he left Knowlesbury.

There were still some hours to spare before the last train left for London; and I drove back again, in a fly from the Knowlesbury station, to Blackwater Park, with the purpose of questioning the gardener and the person who kept the lodge. If they, too, proved unable to assist me, my resources, for the present, were at an end, and I might return to town.

I dismissed the fly a mile distant from the park; and, getting my directions from the driver, proceeded by myself to the house.

As I turned into the lane from the high road, I saw a man, with a carpet-bag, walking before me rapidly on the way to the lodge. He was a little man, dressed in shabby black, and wearing a remarkably large hat. I set him down (as well as it was possible to judge) for a lawyer's clerk; and stopped at once to widen the distance between us. He had not heard me; and he walked on out of sight, without looking back. When I passed through the gates myself, a little while after-

wards, he was not visible—he had evidently gone on to the house.

There were two women in the lodge. One of them was old; the other, I knew at once, by Marian's description of her, to be Margaret Porcher.

I asked first if Sir Percival was at the park; and, receiving a reply in the negative, inquired next when he had left it. Neither of the women could tell me more than that he had gone away in the summer. I could extract nothing from Margaret Porcher but vacant smiles and shakings of the head. The old woman was a little more intelligent; and I managed to lead her into speaking of the manner of Sir Percival's departure, and of the alarm that it caused her. She remembered her master calling her out of bed, and remembered his frightening her by swearing—but the date at which the occurrence happened was, as she honestly acknowledged, 'quite beyond her.'

On leaving the lodge, I saw the gardener at work not far off. When I first addressed him, he looked at me rather distrustfully; but, on my using Mrs. Michelson's name, with a civil reference to himself, he entered into conversation readily enough. There is no need to describe what passed between us: it ended, as all my other attempts to discover the date had ended. The gardener knew that his master had driven away, at night, 'some time in July, the last fortnight or the last ten days in the month'—and knew no more.

While we were speaking together, I saw the man in black, with the large hat, come out from the house, and stand at some little distance observing us.

Certain suspicions of his errand at Blackwater Park had already crossed my mind. They were now increased by the gardener's inability (or unwillingness)

to tell me who the man was; and I determined to clear the way before me, if possible, by speaking to him. The plainest question I could put, as a stranger, would be to inquire if the house was allowed to be shown to visitors. I walked up to the man at once, and accosted him in those words.

His look and manner unmistakably betrayed that he knew who I was, and that he wanted to irritate me into quarrelling with him. His reply was insolent enough to have answered the purpose, if I had been less determined to control myself. As it was, I met him with the most resolute politeness; apologised for my involuntary intrusion (which he called a 'trespass'), and left the grounds. It was exactly as I suspected. The recognition of me, when I left Mr. Kyrle's office, had been evidently communicated to Sir Percival Glyde; and the man in black had been sent to the park, in anticipation of my making inquiries at the house, or in the neighbourhood. If I had given him the least chance of lodging any sort of legal complaint against me, the interference of the local magistrate would no doubt have been turned to account, as a clog on my proceedings, and a means of separating me from Marian and Laura for some days at least.

I was prepared to be watched on the way from Blackwater Park to the station, exactly as I had been watched, in London, the day before. But I could not discover, at the time, whether I was really followed on this occasion or not. The man in black might have had means of tracking me at his disposal of which I was not aware—but I certainly saw nothing of him, in his own person, either on the way to the station, or afterwards on my arrival at the London terminus, in the evening. I reached home, on foot; taking the precaution, before

I approached our own door, of walking round by the loneliest street in the neighbourhood, and there stopping and looking back more than once over the open space behind me. I had first learnt to use this stratagem against suspected treachery in the wilds of Central America—and now I was practising it again, with the same purpose and with even greater caution, in the heart of civilized London!

Nothing had happened to alarm Marian during my absence. She asked eagerly what success I had met with. When I told her, she could not conceal her surprise at the indifference with which I spoke of the failure of my investigations thus far.

The truth was, that the ill-success of my inquiries had in no sense daunted me. I had pursued them as a matter of duty, and I had expected nothing from them. In the state of my mind, at that time, it was almost a relief to me to know that the struggle was now narrowed to a trial of strength between myself and Sir Percival Glyde. The vindictive motive had mingled itself, all along, with my other and better motives; and I confess it was a satisfaction to me to feel that the surest way—the only way left—of serving Laura's cause, was to fasten my hold firmly on the villain who had married her.

While I acknowledge that I was not strong enough to keep my motives above the reach of this instinct of revenge, I can honestly say something in my own favour, on the other side. No base speculation on the future relations of Laura and myself, and on the private and personal concessions which I might force from Sir Percival if I once had him at my mercy, ever entered my mind. I never said to myself, 'If I do succeed, it shall be one result of my success that I put it out of her

husband's power to take her from me again.' I could not look at her and think of the future with such thoughts as those. The sad sight of the change in her from her former self, made the one interest of my love an interest of tenderness and compassion, which her father or her brother might have felt, and which I felt, God knows, in my inmost heart. All my hopes looked no farther on, now, than to the day of her recovery. There, till she was strong again and happy again—there, till she could look at me as she had once looked, and speak to me as she had once spoken—the future of my happiest thoughts and my dearest wishes ended.

These words are written under no prompting of idle self-contemplation. Passages in this narrative are soon to come, which will set the minds of others in judgment on my conduct. It is right that the best and the worst of me should be fairly balanced, before that time.

On the morning after my return from Hampshire, I took Marian up-stairs into my working-room; and there laid before her the plan that I had matured, thus far, for mastering the one assailable point in the life of Sir Percival Glyde.

The way to the Secret lay through the mystery, hitherto impenetrable to all of us, of the woman in white. The approach to that, in its turn, might be gained by obtaining the assistance of Anne Catherick's mother; and the only ascertainable means of prevailing on Mrs. Catherick to act or to speak in the matter, depended on the chance of my discovering local particulars and family particulars, first of all, from Mrs. Clements. After thinking the subject over carefully, I felt certain that I could only begin the new inquiries

by placing myself in communication with the faithful friend and protectress of Anne Catherick.

The first difficulty, then, was to find Mrs. Clements.

I was indebted to Marian's quick perception for meeting this necessity at once by the best and simplest means. She proposed to write to the farm near Limmeridge (Todd's Corner), to inquire whether Mrs. Clements had communicated with Mrs. Todd during the past few months. How Mrs. Clements had been separated from Anne, it was impossible for us to say; but that separation once effected, it would certainly occur to Mrs. Clements to inquire after the missing woman in the neighbourhood of all others to which she was known to be most attached—the neighbourhood of Limmeridge. I saw directly that Marian's proposal offered us a prospect of success; and she wrote to Mrs. Todd accordingly by that day's post.

While we were waiting for the reply, I made myself master of all the information Marian could afford on the subject of Sir Percival's family, and of his early life. She could only speak on these topics from hearsay; but she was reasonably certain of the truth of what little she had to tell.

Sir Percival was an only child. His father, Sir Felix Glyde, had suffered, from his birth, under a painful and incurable deformity, and had shunned all society from his earliest years. His sole happiness was in the enjoyment of music; and he had married a lady with tastes similar to his own, who was said to be a most accomplished musician. He inherited the Blackwater property while still a young man. Neither he nor his wife, after taking possession, made advances of any sort towards the society of the neighbourhood; and no one endeavoured to tempt them into abandoning their

reserve, with the one disastrous exception of the rector of the parish.

The rector was the worst of all innocent mischief-makers—an over-zealous man. He had heard that Sir Felix had left College with the character of being little better than a revolutionist in politics and an infidel in religion; and he arrived conscientiously at the conclusion that it was his bounden duty to summon the lord of the manor to hear sound views enunciated in the parish church. Sir Felix fiercely resented the clergyman's well-meant but ill-directed interference; insulting him so grossly and so publicly, that the families in the neighbourhood sent letters of indignant remonstrance to the park; and even the tenants on the Blackwater property expressed their opinion as strongly as they dared. The baronet, who had no country tastes of any kind, and no attachment to the estate, or to any one living on it, declared that society at Blackwater should never have a second chance of annoying him; and left the place from that moment.

After a short residence in London, he and his wife departed for the Continent; and never returned to England again. They lived part of the time in France, and part in Germany—always keeping themselves in the strict retirement which the morbid sense of his own personal deformity had made a necessity to Sir Felix. Their son, Percival, had been born abroad, and had been educated there by private tutors. His mother was the first of his parents whom he lost. His father had died a few years after her, either in 1825 or 1826. Sir Percival had been in England, as a young man, once or twice before that period; but his acquaintance with the late Mr. Fairlie did not begin till after the time of his father's death. They soon became very intimate,

although Sir Percival was seldom, or never, at Limmeridge House in those days. Mr. Frederick Fairlie might have met him once or twice in Mr. Philip Fairlie's company; but he could have known little of him at that or at any other time. Sir Percival's only intimate friend in the Fairlie family had been Laura's father.

These were all the particulars that I could gain from Marian. They suggested nothing which was useful to my present purpose, but I noted them down carefully, in the event of their proving to be of importance at any future period.

Mrs. Todd's reply (addressed, by our own wish, to a post-office at some distance from us) had arrived at its destination when I went to apply for it. The chances, which had been all against us, hitherto, turned, from this moment, in our favour. Mrs. Todd's letter contained the first item of information of which we were in search.

Mrs. Clements, it appeared, had (as we had conjectured) written to Todd's Corner; asking pardon, in the first place, for the abrupt manner in which she and Anne had left their friends at the farm-house (on the morning after I had met the woman in white in Limmeridge churchyard); and then informing Mrs. Todd of Anne's disappearance, and entreating that she would cause inquiries to be made in the neighbourhood, on the chance that the lost woman might have strayed back to Limmeridge. In making this request, Mrs. Clements had been careful to add to it the address at which she might always be heard of; and that address Mrs. Todd now transmitted to Marian. It was in London; and within half an hour's walk of our own lodging.

In the words of the proverb, I was resolved not to let the grass grow under my feet. The next morning, I set forth to seek an interview with Mrs. Clements. This was my first step forward in the investigation. The story of the desperate attempt to which I now stood committed, begins here.

VI.

The address communicated by Mrs. Todd took me to a lodging-house situated in a respectable street near the Gray's Inn Road.

When I knocked, the door was opened by Mrs. Clements herself. She did not appear to remember me; and asked what my business was. I recalled to her our meeting in Limmeridge churchyard, at the close of my interview there with the woman in white; taking special care to remind her that I was the person who assisted Anne Catherick (as Anne had herself declared) to escape the pursuit from the Asylum. This was my only claim to the confidence of Mrs. Clements. She remembered the circumstance the moment I spoke of it; and asked me into the parlour, in the greatest anxiety to know if I had brought her any news of Anne.

It was impossible for me to tell her the whole truth, without, at the same time, entering into particulars on the subject of the conspiracy, which it would have been dangerous to confide to a stranger. I could only abstain most carefully from raising any false hopes, and then explain that the object of my visit was to discover the persons who were really responsible for Anne's disappearance. I even added, so as to exonerate myself from any after-reproach of my own conscience, that I entertained not the least hope of being able to trace her;

that I believed we should never see her alive again; and that my main interest in the affair was to bring to punishment two men whom I suspected to be concerned in luring her away, and at whose hands I and some dear friends of mine had suffered a grievous wrong. With this explanation, I left it to Mrs. Clements to say whether our interest in the matter (whatever difference there might be in the motives which actuated us) was not the same; and whether she felt any reluctance to forward my object by giving me such information on the subject of my inquiries as she happened to possess.

The poor woman was, at first, too much confused and agitated to understand thoroughly what I said to her. She could only reply that I was welcome to anything she could tell me in return for the kindness I had shown to Anne. But as she was not very quick and ready, at the best of times, in talking to strangers, she would beg me to put her in the right way, and to say where I wished her to begin.

Knowing by experience that the plainest narrative attainable from persons who are not accustomed to arrange their ideas, is the narrative which goes far enough back at the beginning to avoid all impediments of retrospection in its course, I asked Mrs. Clements to tell me, first, what had happened after she left Limmeridge; and so, by watchful questioning, carried her on from point to point till we reached the period of Anne's disappearance.

The substance of the information which I thus obtained, was as follows:

On leaving the farm at Todd's Corner, Mrs. Clements and Anne had travelled, that day, as far as Derby; and had remained there a week, on Anne's account. They had then gone on to London, and had lived in

the lodging occupied by Mrs. Clements, at that time, for a month or more, when circumstances connected with the house and the landlord had obliged them to change their quarters. Anne's terror of being discovered in London or its neighbourhood, whenever they ventured to walk out, had gradually communicated itself to Mrs. Clements; and she had determined on removing to one of the most out-of-the-way places in England—to the town of Grimsby in Lincolnshire, where her deceased husband had passed all his early life. His relatives were respectable people settled in the town; they had always treated Mrs. Clements with great kindness; and she thought it impossible to do better than go there, and take the advice of her husband's friends. Anne would not hear of returning to her mother at Welmingham, because she had been removed to the Asylum from that place, and because Sir Percival would be certain to go back there and find her again. There was serious weight in this objection, and Mrs. Clements felt that it was not to be easily removed.

At Grimsby the first serious symptoms of illness had shown themselves in Anne. They appeared soon after the news of Lady Glyde's marriage had been made public in the newspapers, and had reached her through that medium.

The medical man who was sent for to attend the sick woman, discovered at once that she was suffering from a serious affection of the heart. The illness lasted long, left her very weak, and returned, at intervals, though with mitigated severity, again and again. They remained at Grimsby, in consequence, during the first half of the new year; and there they might probably have stayed much longer, but for the sudden resolution

which Anne took, at this time, to venture back to Hampshire, for the purpose of obtaining a private interview with Lady Glyde.

Mrs. Clements did all in her power to oppose the execution of this hazardous and unaccountable project. No explanation of her motives was offered by Anne, except that she believed the day of her death was not far off, and that she had something on her mind which must be communicated to Lady Glyde, at any risk, in secret. Her resolution to accomplish this purpose was so firmly settled, that she declared her intention of going to Hampshire by herself, if Mrs. Clements felt any unwillingness to go with her. The doctor, on being consulted, was of opinion that serious opposition to her wishes would, in all probability, produce another and perhaps a fatal fit of illness; and Mrs. Clements, under this advice, yielded to necessity, and once more, with sad forebodings of trouble and danger to come, allowed Anne Catherick to have her own way.

On the journey from London to Hampshire, Mrs. Clements discovered that one of their fellow-passengers was well acquainted with the neighbourhood of Blackwater, and could give her all the information she needed on the subject of localities. In this way, she found out that the only place they could go to which was not dangerously near to Sir Percival's residence, was a large village, called Sandon. The distance, here, from Blackwater Park was between three and four miles—and that distance, and back again, Anne had walked, on each occasion when she had appeared in the neighbourhood of the lake.

For the few days, during which they were at Sandon without being discovered, they had lived a little way from the village, in the cottage of a decent widow-

woman, who had a bedroom to let, and whose discreet silence Mrs. Clements had done her best to secure, for the first week at least. She had also tried hard to induce Anne to be content with writing to Lady Glyde, in the first instance. But the failure of the warning contained in the anonymous letter sent to Limmeridge had made Anne resolute to speak this time, and obstinate in the determination to go on her errand alone.

Mrs. Clements, nevertheless, followed her privately on each occasion when she went to the lake—without, however, venturing near enough to the boat-house to be witness of what took place there. When Anne returned for the last time from the dangerous neighbourhood, the fatigue of walking, day after day, distances which were far too great for her strength, added to the exhausting effect of the agitation from which she had suffered, produced the result which Mrs. Clements had dreaded all along. The old pain over the heart and the other symptoms of the illness at Grimsby returned; and Anne was confined to her bed in the cottage.

In this emergency, the first necessity, as Mrs. Clements knew by experience, was to endeavour to quiet Anne's anxiety of mind; and, for this purpose, the good woman went herself the next day to the lake, to try if she could find Lady Glyde (who would be sure, as Anne said, to take her daily walk to the boat-house), and prevail on her to come back privately to the cottage near Sandon. On reaching the outskirts of the plantation, Mrs. Clements encountered, not Lady Glyde, but a tall, stout, elderly gentleman with a book in his hand—in other words, Count Fosco.

The Count, after looking at her very attentively for a moment, asked if she expected to see any one in that

place; and added, before she could reply, that he was waiting there with a message from Lady Glyde, but that he was not quite certain whether the person then before him answered the description of the person with whom he was desired to communicate.

Upon this, Mrs. Clements at once confided her errand to him, and entreated that he would help to allay Anne's anxiety by trusting his message to her. The Count most readily and kindly complied with her request. The message, he said, was a very important one. Lady Glyde entreated Anne and her good friend to return immediately to London, as she felt certain that Sir Percival would discover them, if they remained any longer in the neighbourhood of Blackwater. She was herself going to London in a short time; and if Mrs. Clements and Anne would go there first, and would let her know what their address was, they should hear from her and see her, in a fortnight or less. The Count added, that he had already attempted to give a friendly warning to Anne herself, but that she had been too much startled by seeing that he was a stranger, to let him approach and speak to her.

To this, Mrs. Clements replied, in the greatest alarm and distress, that she asked nothing better than to take Anne safely to London; but that there was no present hope of removing her from the dangerous neighbourhood, as she lay ill in bed at that moment. The Count inquired if Mrs. Clements had sent for medical advice; and hearing that she had hitherto hesitated to do so, from the fear of making their position publicly known in the village, informed her that he was himself a medical man, and that he would go back with her if she pleased, and see what could be done for Anne. Mrs. Clements (feeling a natural con-

fidence in the Count, as a person trusted with a secret message from Lady Glyde) gratefully accepted the offer; and they went back together to the cottage.

Anne was asleep when they got there. The Count started at the sight of her (evidently from astonishment at her resemblance to Lady Glyde). Poor Mrs. Clements supposed that he was only shocked to see how ill she was. He would not allow her to be awakened; he was contented with putting questions to Mrs. Clements about her symptoms, with looking at her, and with lightly touching her pulse. Sandon was a large enough place to have a grocer's and druggist's shop in it; and thither the Count went, to write his prescription, and to get the medicine made up. He brought it back himself: and told Mrs. Clements that the medicine was a powerful stimulant, and that it would certainly give Anne strength to get up and bear the fatigue of a journey to London of only a few hours. The remedy was to be administered at stated times, on that day, and on the day after. On the third day she would be well enough to travel; and he arranged to meet Mrs. Clements at the Blackwater station, and to see them off by the midday train. If they did not appear, he would assume that Anne was worse, and would proceed at once to the cottage.

As events turned out, no such emergency as this occurred.

The medicine had an extraordinary effect on Anne, and the good results of it were helped by the assurance Mrs. Clements could now give her that she would soon see Lady Glyde in London. At the appointed day and time (when they had not been quite so long as a week in Hampshire, altogether), they arrived at the station.

The Count was waiting there for them, and was talking to an elderly lady, who appeared to be going to travel by the train to London also. He most kindly assisted them, and put them into the carriage himself; begging Mrs. Clements not to forget to send her address to Lady Glyde. The elderly lady did not travel in the same compartment; and they did not notice what became of her on reaching the London terminus. Mrs. Clements secured respectable lodgings in a quiet neighbourhood; and then wrote, as she had engaged to do, to inform Lady Glyde of the address.

A little more than a fortnight passed, and no answer came.

At the end of that time, a lady (the same elderly lady whom they had seen at the station) called in a cab, and said that she came from Lady Glyde, who was then at an hotel in London, and who wished to see Mrs. Clements for the purpose of arranging a future interview with Anne. Mrs. Clements expressed her willingness (Anne being present at the time and entreating her to do so) to forward the object in view, especially as she was not required to be away from the house for more than half an hour at the most. She and the elderly lady (clearly Madame Fosco) then left in the cab. The lady stopped the cab, after it had driven some distance, at a shop, before they got to the hotel; and begged Mrs. Clements to wait for her for a few minutes, while she made a purchase that had been forgotten. She never appeared again.

After waiting some time, Mrs. Clements became alarmed, and ordered the cabman to drive back to her lodgings. When she got there, after an absence of rather more than half an hour, Anne was gone.

The only information to be obtained from the people

of the house, was derived from the servant who waited on the lodgers. She had opened the door to a boy from the street, who had left a letter for 'the young woman who lived on the second floor' (the part of the house which Mrs. Clements occupied). The servant had delivered the letter; had then gone down-stairs; and, five minutes afterwards, had observed Anne open the front door, and go out, dressed in her bonnet and shawl. She had probably taken the letter with her; for it was not to be found, and it was therefore impossible to tell what inducement had been offered to make her leave the house. It must have been a strong one—for she would never stir out alone in London of her own accord. If Mrs. Clements had not known this by experience, nothing would have induced her to go away in the cab, even for so short a time as half an hour only.

As soon as she could collect her thoughts, the first idea that naturally occured to Mrs. Clements, was to go and make inquiries at the Asylum, to which she dreaded that Anne had been taken back.

She went there the next day—having been informed of the locality in which the house was situated by Anne herself. The answer she received (her application having, in all probability, been made a day or two before the false Anne Catherick had really been consigned to safe keeping in the Asylum) was, that no such person had been brought back there. She had then written to Mrs. Catherick, at Welmingham, to know if she had seen or heard anything of her daughter; and had received an answer in the negative. After that reply had reached her, she was at the end of her resources, and perfectly ignorant where else to inquire, or what else to do. From that time to this, she had remained

in total ignorance of the cause of Anne's disappearance, and of the end of Anne's story.

VII.

Thus far, the information which I had received from Mrs. Clements—though it established facts of which I had not previously been aware—was of a preliminary character only.

It was clear that the series of deceptions which had removed Anne Catherick to London and separated her from Mrs. Clements, had been accomplished solely by Count Fosco and the Countess; and the question whether any part of the conduct of husband or wife had been of a kind to place either of them within reach of the law, might be well worthy of future consideration. But the purpose I had now in view led me in another direction than this. The immediate object of my visit to Mrs. Clements was to make some approach at least to the discovery of Sir Percival's secret; and she had said nothing, as yet, which advanced me on my way to that important end. I felt the necessity of trying to awaken her recollections of other times, persons, and events, than those on which her memory had hitherto been employed; and, when I next spoke, I spoke with that object indirectly in view.

'I wish I could be of any help to you in this sad calamity,' I said. 'All I can do is to feel heartily for your distress. If Anne had been your own child, Mrs. Clements, you could have shown her no truer kindness —you could have made no readier sacrifices for her sake.'

'There's no great merit in that, sir,' said Mrs. Clements, simply. 'The poor thing was as good as

my own child to me. I nursed her from a baby, sir; bringing her up by hand—and a hard job it was to rear her. It wouldn't go to my heart so to lose her, if I hadn't made her first shortclothes, and taught her to walk. I always said she was sent to console me for never having chick or child of my own. And now she's lost, the old times keep coming back to my mind; and, even at my age, I can't help crying about her—I can't indeed, sir!'

I waited a little to give Mrs. Clements time to compose herself. Was the light that I had been looking for so long, glimmering on me—far off, as yet—in the good woman's recollections of Anne's early life?

'Did you know Mrs. Catherick before Anne was born?' I asked.

'Not very long, sir—not above four months. We saw a great deal of each other in that time, but we were never very friendly together.'

Her voice was steadier as she made that reply. Painful as many of her recollections might be, I observed that it was, unconsciously, a relief to her mind to revert to the dimly-seen troubles of the past, after dwelling so long on the vivid sorrows of the present.

'Were you and Mrs. Catherick neighbours?' I inquired, leading her memory on, as encouragingly as I could.

'Yes, sir—neighbours at Old Welmingham.'

'*Old* Welmingham? There are two places of that name, then, in Hampshire?'

'Well, sir, there used to be in those days—better than three-and-twenty years ago. They built a new town about two miles off, convenient to the river—and Old Welmingham, which was never much more than a village, got in time to be deserted. The new town

is the place they call Welmingham, now—but the old parish church is the parish church still. It stands by itself, with the houses pulled down, or gone to ruin all round it. I've lived to see sad changes. It was a pleasant, pretty place in my time.'

'Did you live there before your marriage, Mrs. Clements?'

'No, sir—I'm a Norfolk woman. It wasn't the place my husband belonged to, either. He was from Grimsby, as I told you; and he served his apprenticeship there. But having friends down south, and hearing of an opening, he got into business at Southampton. It was in a small way, but he made enough for a plain man to retire on, and settled at Old Welmingham. I went there with him, when he married me. We were neither of us young; but we lived very happy together—happier than our neighbour, Mr. Catherick, lived along with his wife, when they came to Old Welmingham, a year or two afterwards.'

'Was your husband acquainted with them before that?'

'With Catherick, sir—not with his wife. She was a stranger to both of us. Some gentleman had made interest for Catherick; and he got the situation of clerk at Welmingham church, which was the reason of his coming to settle in our neighbourhood. He brought his newly-married wife along with him; and he heard, in course of time, she had been lady's maid in a family that lived at Varneck Hall, near Southampton. Catherick had found it a hard matter to get her to marry him—in consequence of her holding herself uncommonly high. He had asked and asked, and given the thing up at last, seeing she was so contrary about it. When he *had* given it up, she turned contrary, just the

other way, and came to him of her own accord, without rhyme or reason seemingly. My poor husband always said that was the time to have given her a lesson. But Catherick was too fond of her to do anything of the sort; he never checked her, either before they were married or after. He was a quick man in his feelings, letting them carry him a deal too far, now in one way, and now in another; and he would have spoilt a better wife than Mrs. Catherick, if a better had married him. I don't like to speak ill of any one, sir—but she was a heartless woman, with a terrible will of her own; fond of foolish admiration and fine clothes, and not caring to show so much as decent outward respect to Catherick, kindly as he always treated her. My husband said he thought things would turn out badly, when they first came to live near us; and his words proved true. Before they had been quite four months in our neighbourhood, there was a dreadful scandal and a miserable break-up in their household. Both of them were in fault—I am afraid both of them were equally in fault.'

'You mean both husband and wife?'

'Oh, no, sir! I don't mean Catherick—he was only to be pitied. I meant his wife, and the person——'

'And the person who caused the scandal?'

'Yes, sir. A gentleman born and brought up, who ought to have set a better example. You know him, sir—and my poor dear Anne knew him, only too well.'

'Sir Percival Glyde?'

'Yes. Sir Percival Glyde.'

My heart beat fast—I thought I had my hand on the clue. How little I knew, then, of the windings of the labyrinth which were still to mislead me!

'Did Sir Percival live in your neighbourhood at that time?' I asked.

'No, sir. He came among us as a stranger. His father had died, not long before, in foreign parts. I remember he was in mourning. He put up at the little inn on the river (they have pulled it down since that time) where gentlemen used to go to fish. He wasn't much noticed when he first came—it was a common thing enough for gentlemen to travel, from all parts of England, to fish in our river.'

'Did he make his appearance in the village before Anne was born?'

'Yes, sir. Anne was born in the June month of eighteen hundred and twenty-seven—and I think he came at the end of April, or the beginning of May.'

'Came as a stranger to all of you? A stranger to Mrs. Catherick, as well as to the rest of the neighbours?'

'So we thought at first, sir. But when the scandal broke out, nobody believed they were strangers. I remember how it happened, as well as if it was yesterday. Catherick came into our garden one night, and woke us by throwing up a handful of gravel from the walk, at our window. I heard him beg my husband, for the Lord's sake, to come down and speak to him. They were a long time together talking in the porch. When my husband came back up-stairs, he was all of a tremble. He sat down on the side of the bed, and he says to me, "Lizzie! I always told you that woman was a bad one; I always said she would end ill—and I'm afraid, in my own mind, that the end has come already. Catherick has found a lot of lace handkerchiefs, and two fine rings, and a new gold watch and chain, hid away in his wife's drawer—things that nobody but a born lady ought ever to have—and his wife won't say how she came by them." "Does he think she stole them?" says I. "No," says he, "steal-

ing would be bad enough. But it's worse than that—she's had no chance of stealing such things as those, and she's not a woman to take them if she had. They're gifts, Lizzie—there's her own initials engraved inside the watch—and Catherick has seen her, talking privately, and carrying on as no married woman should, with that gentleman in mourning—Sir Percival Glyde. Don't you say anything about it—I've quieted Catherick for to-night. I've told him to keep his tongue to himself, and his eyes and his ears open, and to wait a day or two, till he can be quite certain." "I believe you are both of you wrong," says I. "It's not in nature, comfortable and respectable as she is here, that Mrs. Catherick should take up with a chance stranger like Sir Percival Glyde." "Ay, but *is* he a stranger to her?" says my husband. "You forget how Catherick's wife came to marry him. She went to him of her own accord, after saying, No, over and over again when he asked her. There have been wicked women, before her time, Lizzie, who have used honest men who loved them as a means of saving their characters—and I'm sorely afraid this Mrs. Catherick is as wicked as the worst of them. We shall see," says my husband, "we shall soon see." And only two days afterwards, we did see.'

Mrs. Clements waited for a moment, before she went on. Even in that moment, I began to doubt whether the clue that I thought I had found was really leading me to the central mystery of the labyrinth, after all. Was this common, too common, story of a man's treachery and a woman's frailty the key to a secret which had been the life-long terror of Sir Percival Glyde?

'Well, sir, Catherick took my husband's advice, and

waited,' Mrs. Clements continued. 'And, as I told you, he hadn't long to wait. On the second day, he found his wife and Sir Percival whispering together quite familiar, close under the vestry of the church. I suppose they thought the neighbourhood of the vestry was the last place in the world where anybody would think of looking after them—but, however that may be, there they were. Sir Percival, being seemingly surprised and confounded, defended himself in such a guilty way that poor Catherick (whose quick temper I have told you of already) fell into a kind of frenzy at his own disgrace, and struck Sir Percival. He was no match (and I am sorry to say it) for the man who had wronged him—and he was beaten in the cruelest manner, before the neighbours who had come to the place on hearing the disturbance, could run in to part them. All this happened towards evening; and before nightfall, when my husband went to Catherick's house, he was gone, nobody knew where. No living soul in the village ever saw him again. He knew too well, by that time, what his wife's vile reason had been for marrying him; and he felt his misery and disgrace—especially after what had happened to him with Sir Percival—too keenly. The clergyman of the parish put an advertisement in the paper, begging him to come back, and saying that he should not lose his situation or his friends. But Catherick had too much pride and spirit, as some people said—too much feeling, as I think, sir—to face his neighbours again, and try to live down the memory of his disgrace. My husband heard from him, when he had left England; and heard a second time, when he was settled, and doing well, in America. He is alive there now, as far as I know; but none of us in the old country—his wicked

wife least of all—are ever likely to set eyes on him again.'

'What became of Sir Percival?' I inquired. 'Did he stay in the neighbourhood?'

'Not he, sir. The place was too hot to hold him. He was heard at high words with Mrs. Catherick, the same night when the scandal broke out—and the next morning he took himself off.'

'And Mrs. Catherick? Surely she never remained in the village, among the people who knew of her disgrace?'

'She did, sir. She was hard enough and heartless enough to set the opinions of all her neighbours at flat defiance. She declared to everybody, from the clergyman downwards, that she was the victim of a dreadful mistake, and that all the scandal-mongers in the place should not drive her out of it as if she was a guilty woman. All through my time, she lived at Old Welmingham; and, after my time, when the new town was building, and the respectable neighbours began moving to it, she moved too, as if she was determined to live among them and scandalise them to the very last. There she is now, and there she will stop, in defiance of the best of them, to her dying day.'

'But how has she lived, through all these years?' I asked. Was her husband able and willing to help her?'

'Both able and willing, sir,' said Mrs. Clements. 'In the second letter he wrote to my good man, he said she had borne his name, and lived in his home, and, wicked as she was, she must not starve like a beggar in the street. He could afford to make her some small allowance, and she might draw for it quarterly, at a place in London.'

'Did she accept the allowance?'

'Not a farthing of it, sir. She said she would never be beholden to Catherick for bit or drop, if she lived to be a hundred. And she has kept her word ever since. When my poor dear husband died, and left all to me, Catherick's letter was put in my possession with the other things—and I told her to let me know if she was ever in want. "I'll let all England know I'm in want," she said, "before I tell Catherick, or any friend of Catherick's. Take that for your answer—and give it to *him* for an answer if he ever writes again."'

'Do you suppose that she had money of her own?'

'Very little, if any, sir. It was said, and said truly, I am afraid, that her means of living came privately from Sir Percival Glyde.'

After that last reply, I waited a little, to reconsider what I had heard. If I unreservedly accepted the story so far, it was now plain that no approach, direct or indirect, to the Secret had yet been revealed to me, and that the pursuit of my object had ended again in leaving me face to face with the most palpable and the most disheartening failure.

But there was one point in the narrative which made me doubt the propriety of accepting it unreservedly, and which suggested the idea of something hidden below the surface.

I could not account to myself for the circumstance of the clerk's guilty wife voluntarily living out all her after-existence on the scene of her disgrace. The woman's own reported statement that she had taken this strange course as a practical assertion of her innocence, did not satisfy me. It seemed, to my mind, more natural and more probable to assume that she

was not so completely a free agent in this matter as she had herself asserted. In that case, who was the likeliest person to possess the power of compelling her to remain at Welmingham? The person unquestionably from whom she derived the means of living. She had refused assistance from her husband, she had no adequate resources of her own, she was a friendless, degraded woman: from what source should she derive help, but from the source at which report pointed—Sir Percival Glyde?

Reasoning on these assumptions, and always bearing in mind the one certain fact to guide me, that Mrs. Catherick was in possession of the Secret, I easily understood that it was Sir Percival's interest to keep her at Welmingham, because her character in that place was certain to isolate her from all communication with female neighbours, and to allow her no opportunities of talking incautiously, in moments of free intercourse with inquisitive bosom friends. But what was the mystery to be concealed? Not Sir Percival's infamous connexion with Mrs. Catherick's disgrace—for the neighbours were the very people who knew of it. Not the suspicion that he was Anne's father—for Welmingham was the place in which that suspicion must inevitably exist. If I accepted the guilty appearances described to me, as unreservedly as others had accepted them; if I drew from them the same superficial conclusion which Mr. Catherick and all his neighbours had drawn—where was the suggestion, in all that I had heard, of a dangerous secret between Sir Percival and Mrs. Catherick, which had been kept hidden from that time to this?

And yet, in those stolen meetings, in those familiar whisperings between the clerk's wife and 'the gentle-

man in mourning,' the clue to discovery existed beyond a doubt.

Was it possible that appearances, in this case, had pointed one way while the truth lay, all the while, unsuspected, in another direction? Could Mrs. Catherick's assertion that she was the victim of a dreadful mistake, by any possibility be true? Or, assuming it to be false, could the conclusion which associated Sir Percival with her guilt, have been founded in some inconceivable error? Had Sir Percival, by any chance, courted the suspicion that was wrong, for the sake of diverting from himself some other suspicion that was right? Here, if I could find it—here was the approach to the Secret, hidden deep under the surface of the apparently unpromising story which I had just heard.

My next questions were now directed to the one object of ascertaining whether Mr. Catherick had, or had not, arrived truly at the conviction of his wife's misconduct. The answers I received from Mrs. Clements, left me in no doubt whatever on that point. Mrs. Catherick had, on the clearest evidence, compromised her reputation, while a single woman, with some person unknown; and had married to save her character. It had been positively ascertained, by calculations of time and place into which I need not enter particularly, that the daughter who bore her husband's name was not her husband's child.

The next object of inquiry, whether it was equally certain that Sir Percival must have been the father of Anne, was beset by far greater difficulties. I was in no position to try the probabilities on one side or on the other, in this instance, by any better test than the test of personal resemblance.

'I suppose you often saw Sir Percival, when he was in your village?' I said.

'Yes, sir—very often,' replied Mrs. Clements.

'Did you ever observe that Anne was like him?'

'She was not at all like him, sir.'

'Was she like her mother, then?'

'Not like her mother, either, sir. Mrs. Catherick was dark, and full in the face.'

Not like her mother, and not like her (supposed) father. I knew that the test by personal resemblance was not to be implicitly trusted—but, on the other hand, it was not to be altogether rejected on that account. Was it possible to strengthen the evidence, by discovering any conclusive facts in relation to the lives of Mrs. Catherick and Sir Percival, before they either of them appeared at Old Welmingham? When I asked my next questions, I put them with this view.

'When Sir Percival first arrived in your neighbourhood,' I said, 'did you hear where he had come from last?'

'No, sir. Some said from Blackwater Park, and some said from Scotland—but nobody knew.'

'Was Mrs. Catherick living in service at Varneck Hall, immediately before her marriage?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And had she been long in her place?'

'Three or four years, sir; I am not quite certain which.'

'Did you ever hear the name of the gentleman to whom Varneck Hall belonged at that time?'

'Yes, sir. His name was Major Donthorne.'

'Did Mr. Catherick, or did any one else you knew, ever hear that Sir Percival was a friend of Major

Donthorne's, or ever see Sir Percival in the neighbourhood of Varneck Hall?'

'Catherick never did, sir, that I can remember—nor any one else, either, that I know of.'

I noted down Major Donthorne's name and address, on the chance that he might still be alive, and that it might be useful, at some future time, to apply to him. Meanwhile, the impression on my mind was now decidedly adverse to the opinion that Sir Percival was Anne's father, and decidedly favourable to the conclusion that the secret of his stolen interviews with Mrs. Catherick was entirely unconnected with the disgrace which the woman had inflicted on her husband's good name. I could think of no further inquiries which I might make to strengthen this impression—I could only encourage Mrs. Clements to speak next of Anne's early days, and watch for any chance-suggestion which might in this way offer itself to me.

'I have not heard yet,' I said, 'how the poor child, born in all this sin and misery, came to be trusted, Mrs. Clements, to your care.'

'There was nobody else, sir, to take the little helpless creature in hand,' replied Mrs. Clements. 'The wicked mother seemed to hate it—as if the poor baby was in fault!—from the day it was born. My heart was heavy for the child; and I made the offer to bring it up as tenderly as if it was my own.'

'Did Anne remain entirely under your care, from that time?'

'Not quite entirely, sir. Mrs. Catherick had her whims and fancies about it, at times; and used now and then to lay claim to the child, as if she wanted to spite me for bringing it up. But these fits of hers never lasted for long. Poor little Anne was always returned

to me, and was always glad to get back—though she had but a gloomy life in my house, having no playmates, like other children, to brighten her up. Our longest separation was when her mother took her to Limmeridge. Just at that time, I lost my husband; and I felt it was as well, in that miserable affliction, that Anne should not be in the house. She was between ten and eleven years old, then; slow at her lessons, poor soul, and not so cheerful as other children—but as pretty a little girl to look at as you would wish to see. I waited at home till her mother brought her back; and then I made the offer to take her with me to London—the truth being, sir, that I could not find it in my heart to stop at Old Welmingham, after my husband's death, the place was so changed and so dismal to me.'

'And did Mrs. Catherick consent to your proposal?'

'No, sir. She came back from the north, harder and bitterer than ever. Folks did say that she had been obliged to ask Sir Percival's leave to go, to begin with; and that she only went to nurse her dying sister at Limmeridge because the poor woman was reported to have saved money—the truth being that she hardly left enough to bury her. These things may have soured Mrs. Catherick, likely enough—but, however that may be, she wouldn't hear of my taking the child away. She seemed to like distressing us both by parting us. All I could do was to give Anne my direction, and to tell her, privately, if she was ever in trouble, to come to me. But years passed before she was free to come. I never saw her again, poor soul, till the night she escaped from the madhouse.'

'You know, Mrs. Clements, why Sir Percival Glyde shut her up?'

'I only know what Anne herself told me, sir. The

poor thing used to ramble and wander about it, sadly. She said her mother had got some secret of Sir Percival's to keep, and had let it out to her, long after I left Hampshire—and when Sir Percival found she knew it, he shut her up. But she never could say what it was, when I asked her. All she could tell me was that her mother might be the ruin and destruction of Sir Percival, if she chose. Mrs. Catherick may have let out just as much as that, and no more. I'm next to certain I should have heard the whole truth from Anne, if she had really known it, as she pretended to do—and as she very likely fancied she did, poor soul.'

This idea had more than once occurred to my own mind. I had already told Marian that I doubted whether Laura was really on the point of making any important discovery when she and Anne Catherick were disturbed by Count Fosco at the boat-house. It was perfectly in character with Anne's mental affliction that she should assume an absolute knowledge of the Secret on no better grounds than vague suspicion, derived from hints which her mother had incautiously let drop in her presence. Sir Percival's guilty distrust would, in that case, infallibly inspire him with the false idea that Anne knew all from her mother, just as it had afterwards fixed in his mind the equally false suspicion that his wife knew all from Anne.

The time was passing; the morning was wearing away. It was doubtful, if I stayed longer, whether I should hear anything more from Mrs. Clements that would be at all useful to my purpose. I had already discovered those local and family particulars, in relation to Mrs. Catherick, of which I had been in search, and I had arrived at certain conclusions, entirely new to me, which might immensely assist in directing the course

of my future proceedings. I rose to take my leave, and to thank Mrs. Clements for the friendly readiness she had shown in affording me information.

'I am afraid you must have thought me very inquisitive,' I said. 'I have troubled you with more questions than many people would have cared to answer.'

'You are heartily welcome, sir, to anything I can tell you,' answered Mrs. Clements. She stopped, and looked at me wistfully. 'But I do wish,' said the poor woman, 'you could have told me a little more about Anne, sir. I thought I saw something in your face, when you came in, which looked as if you could. You can't think how hard it is, not even to know whether she is living or dead. I could bear it better if I was only certain. You said you never expected we should see her alive again. Do you know, sir—do you know for truth—that it has pleased God to take her?'

I was not proof against this appeal; it would have been unspeakably mean and cruel of me if I had resisted it.

'I am afraid there is no doubt of the truth,' I answered, gently: 'I have the certainty, in my own mind, that her troubles in this world are over.'

The poor woman dropped into her chair, and hid her face from me. 'Oh, sir,' she said, 'how do you know it? Who can have told you?'

'No one has told me, Mrs. Clements. But I have reasons for feeling sure of it—reasons which I promise you shall know, as soon as I can safely explain them. I am certain she was not neglected in her last moments; I am certain the heart-complaint, from which she suffered so sadly, was the true cause of her death. You shall feel as sure of this, as I do, soon—you shall know, before long, that she is buried in a quiet country

churchyard; in a pretty, peaceful place, which you might have chosen for her yourself.'

'Dead!' said Mrs. Clements; 'dead so young—and I am left to hear it! I made her first short frocks. I taught her to walk. The first time she ever said, Mother, she said it to *me*—and, now, I am left, and Anne is taken! Did you say, sir,' said the poor woman, removing the handkerchief from her face, and looking up at me for the first time—'did you say that she had been nicely buried? Was it the sort of funeral she might have had, if she had really been my own child?'

I assured her that it was. She seemed to take an inexplicable pride in my answer—to find a comfort in it, which no other and higher considerations could afford. 'It would have broken my heart,' she said, simply, 'if Anne had not been nicely buried—but, how do you know it, sir? who told you?' I once more entreated her to wait until I could speak to her unreservedly. 'You are sure to see me again,' I said; 'for I have a favour to ask, when you are a little more composed—perhaps in a day or two.'

'Don't keep it waiting, sir, on my account,' said Mrs. Clements. 'Never mind my crying, if I can be of use. If you have anything on your mind to say to me, sir—please to say it now.'

'I only wish to ask you one last question,' I said. 'I only want to know Mrs. Catherick's address at Welmingham.'

My request so startled Mrs. Clements, that, for the moment, even the tidings of Anne's death seemed to be driven from her mind. Her tears suddenly ceased to flow, and she sat looking at me in blank amazement.

'For the Lord's sake, sir!' she said, 'what do you want with Mrs. Catherick?'

'I want this, Mrs. Clements,' I replied: 'I want to know the secret of those private meetings of hers with Sir Percival Glyde. There is something more, in what you have told me of that woman's past conduct and of that man's past relations with her, than you, or any of your neighbours, ever suspected. There is a Secret we none of us know of between those two—and I am going to Mrs. Catherick, with the resolution to find it out.'

'Think twice about it, sir!' said Mrs. Clements, rising, in her earnestness, and laying her hand on my arm. 'She's an awful woman—you don't know her as I do. Think twice about it.'

'I am sure your warning is kindly meant, Mrs. Clements. But I am determined to see the woman, whatever comes of it.'

Mrs. Clements looked me anxiously in the face.

'I see your mind is made up, sir,' she said. 'I will give you the address.'

I wrote it down in my pocket-book; and then took her hand, to say farewell.

'You shall hear from me, soon,' I said; 'you shall know all that I have promised to tell you.'

Mrs. Clements sighed, and shook her head doubtfully.

'An old woman's advice is sometimes worth taking, sir,' she said. 'Think twice before you go to Welmingham.'

VIII.

When I reached home again, after my interview with Mrs. Clements, I was struck by the appearance of a change in Laura.

The unvarying gentleness and patience which long misfortune had tried so cruelly and had never con-

quered yet, seemed now to have suddenly failed her. Insensible to all Marian's attempts to soothe and amuse her, she sat, with her neglected drawing pushed away on the table; her eyes resolutely cast down, her fingers twining and untwining themselves restlessly in her lap. Marian rose when I came in, with a silent distress in her face; waited for a moment, to see if Laura would look up at my approach; whispered to me, 'Try if *you* can rouse her;' and left the room.

I sat down in the vacant chair; gently unclasped the poor, worn, restless fingers; and took both her hands in mine.

'What are you thinking of, Laura? Tell me, my darling—try and tell me what it is.'

She struggled with herself, and raised her eyes to mine. 'I can't feel happy,' she said; 'I can't help thinking——' She stopped, bent forward a little, and laid her head on my shoulder, with a terrible mute helplessness that struck me to the heart.

'Try to tell me,' I repeated, gently; 'try to tell me why you are not happy.'

'I am so useless—I am such a burden on both of you,' she answered, with a weary, hopeless sigh. 'You work and get money, Walter; and Marian helps you. Why is there nothing I can do? You will end in liking Marian better than you like me—you will, because I am so helpless! Oh, don't, don't, don't treat me like a child!'

I raised her head, and smoothed away the tangled hair that fell over her face, and kissed her—my poor, faded flower! my lost, afflicted sister! 'You shall help us, Laura,' I said; 'you shall begin, my darling, to-day.'

She looked at me with a feverish eagerness, with a breathless interest, that made me tremble for the new

life of hope which I had called into being by those few words.

I rose, and set her drawing materials in order, and placed them near her again.

'You know that I work and get money by drawing,' I said. 'Now you have taken such pains, now you are so much improved, you shall begin to work and get money, too. Try to finish this little sketch as nicely and prettily as you can. When it is done, I will take it away with me; and the same person will buy it who buys all that I do. You shall keep your own earnings in your own purse; and Marian shall come to you to help us, as often as she comes to me. Think how useful you are going to make yourself to both of us, and you will soon be as happy, Laura, as the day is long.'

Her face grew eager, and brightened into a smile. In the moment while it lasted, in the moment when she again took up the pencils that had been laid aside, she almost looked like the Laura of past days.

I had rightly interpreted the first signs of a new growth and strength in her mind, unconsciously expressing themselves in the notice she had taken of the occupations which filled her sister's life and mine. Marian (when I told her what had passed) saw, as I saw, that she was longing to assume her own little position of importance, to raise herself in her own estimation and in ours—and, from that day, we tenderly helped the new ambition which gave promise of the hopeful, happier future, that might now not be far off. Her drawings, as she finished them, or tried to finish them, were placed in my hands; Marian took them from me and hid them carefully, and I set aside a little weekly tribute from my earnings, to be offered to her as the price paid by strangers for the poor, faint, valueless

sketches, of which I was the only purchaser. It was hard sometimes to maintain our innocent deception, when she proudly brought out her purse to contribute her share towards the expenses, and wondered, with serious interest, whether I or she had earned the most that week. I have all those hidden drawings in my possession still: they are my treasures beyond price—the dear remembrances that I love to keep alive—the friends, in past adversity, that my heart will never part from, my tenderness never forget.

Am I trifling, here, with the necessities of my task? am I looking forward to the happier time which my narrative has not yet reached? Yes. Back again—back to the days of doubt and dread, when the spirit within me struggled hard for its life, in the icy stillness of perpetual suspense. I have paused and rested for a while on my forward course. It is not, perhaps, time wasted, if the friends who read these pages have paused and rested too.

I took the first opportunity I could find of speaking to Marian in private, and of communicating to her the result of the inquiries which I had made that morning. She seemed to share the opinion on the subject of my proposed journey to Welmingham, which Mrs. Clements had already expressed to me.

'Surely, Walter,' she said, 'you hardly know enough yet to give you any hope of claiming Mrs. Catherick's confidence? Is it wise to proceed to these extremities, before you have really exhausted all safer and simpler means of attaining your object? When you told me that Sir Percival and the Count were the only two people in existence who knew the exact date of Laura's journey, you forgot, and I forgot, that there was a

third person who must surely know it—I mean Mrs. Rubelle. Would it not be far easier, and far less dangerous, to insist on a confession from her, than to force it from Sir Percival?'

'It might be easier,' I replied; 'but we are not aware of the full extent of Mrs. Rubelle's connivance and interest in the conspiracy; and we are therefore not certain that the date has been impressed on her mind, as it has been assuredly impressed on the minds of Sir Percival and the Count. It is too late, now, to waste the time on Mrs. Rubelle, which may be all important to the discovery of the one assailable point in Sir Percival's life. Are you thinking a little too seriously, Marian, of the risk I may run in returning to Hampshire? Are you beginning to doubt whether Sir Percival Glyde may not, in the end, be more than a match for me?'

'He will not be more than your match,' she replied decidedly, 'because he will not be helped in resisting you by the impenetrable wickedness of the Count.'

'What has led you to that conclusion?' I asked, in some surprise.

'My own knowledge of Sir Percival's obstinacy and impatience of the Count's control,' she answered. 'I believe he will insist on meeting you single-handed—just as he insisted, at first, on acting for himself at Blackwater Park. The time for suspecting the Count's interference, will be the time when you have Sir Percival at your mercy. His own interests will then be directly threatened—and he will act, Walter, to terrible purpose, in his own defence.'

'We may deprive him of his weapons, beforehand,' I said. 'Some of the particulars I have heard from Mrs. Clements may yet be turned to account against him;

and other means of strengthening the case may be at our disposal. There are passages in Mrs. Michelson's narrative which show that the Count found it necessary to place himself in communication with Mr. Fairlie; and there may be circumstances which compromise him in that proceeding. While I am away, Marian, write to Mr. Fairlie, and say that you want an answer describing exactly what passed between the Count and himself, and informing you also of any particulars that may have come to his knowledge at the same time, in connexion with his niece. Tell him that the statement you request will, sooner or later, be insisted on, if he shows any reluctance to furnish you with it of his own accord.'

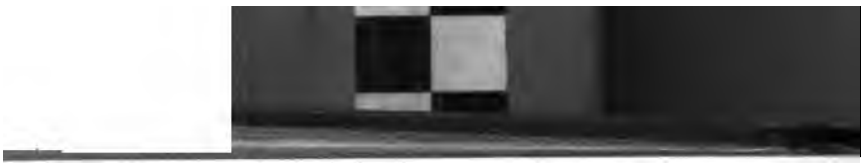
'The letter shall be written, Walter. But are you really determined to go to Welmingham?'

'Absolutely determined. I will devote the next two days to earning what we want for the week to come; and, on the third day, I go to Hampshire.'

When the third day came, I was ready for my journey.

As it was possible that I might be absent for some little time, I arranged with Marian that we were to correspond every day; of course addressing each other by assumed names, for caution's sake. As long as I heard from her regularly, I should assume that nothing was wrong. But if the morning came and brought me no letter, my return to London would take place, as a matter of course, by the first train. I contrived to reconcile Laura to my departure by telling her that I was going to the country to find new purchasers for her drawings and for mine; and I left her occupied and happy. Marian followed me down-stairs to the street door.

'Remember what anxious hearts you leave here,' she



whispered, as we stood together in the passage; 'remember all the hopes that hang on your safe return. If strange things happen to you on this journey; if you and Sir Percival meet——'

'What makes you think we shall meet?' I asked.

'I don't know—I have fears and fancies that I can't account for. Laugh at them, Walter, if you like—but, for God's sake, keep your temper, if you come in contact with that man!'

'Never fear, Marian! I answer for my self-control.'

With those words we parted.

I walked briskly to the station. There was a glow of hope in me; there was a growing conviction in my mind that my journey, this time, would not be taken in vain. It was a fine, clear, cold morning; my nerves were firmly strung, and I felt all the strength of my resolution stirring in me vigorously from head to foot.

As I crossed the railway platform, and looked right and left among the people congregated on it, to search for any faces among them that I knew, the doubt occurred to me whether it might not have been to my advantage if I had adopted a disguise, before setting out for Hampshire. But there was something so repellent to me in the idea—something so meanly like the common herd of spies and informers in the mere act of adopting a disguise—that I dismissed the question from consideration, almost as soon as it had risen in my mind. Even as a mere matter of expediency the proceeding was doubtful in the extreme. If I tried the experiment at home, the landlord of the house would, sooner or later, discover me, and would have his suspicions aroused immediately. If I tried it away from home, the same persons might see me, by the commonest accident, with the disguise and without it; and

I should, in that way, be inviting the notice and distrust which it was my most pressing interest to avoid. In my own character I had acted thus far—and in my own character I was resolved to continue to the end.

The train left me at Welmingham, early in the afternoon.

Is there any wilderness of sand in the deserts of Arabia, is there any prospect of desolation among the ruins of Palestine, which can rival the repelling effect on the eye, and the depressing influence on the mind, of an English country town, in the first stage of its existence, and in the transition state of its prosperity? I asked myself that question, as I passed through the clean desolation, the neat ugliness, the prim torpor of the streets of Welmingham. And the tradesmen who stared after me from their lonely shops; the trees that drooped helpless in their arid exile of unfinished crescents and squares; the dead house-carcases that waited in vain for the vivifying human element to animate them with the breath of life; every creature that I saw; every object that I passed—seemed to answer with one accord: The deserts of Arabia are innocent of our civilised desolation; the ruins of Palestine are incapable of our modern gloom!

I inquired my way to the quarter of the town in which Mrs. Catherick lived; and on reaching it found myself in a square of small houses, one story high. There was a bare little plot of grass in the middle, protected by a cheap wire fence. An elderly nursemaid and two children were standing in a corner of the enclosure, looking at a lean goat tethered to the grass. Two foot-passengers were talking together on one side of the pavement before the houses, and an idle little boy was

leading an idle little dog along by a string, on the other. I heard the dull tinkling of a piano at a distance, accompanied by the intermittent knocking of a hammer nearer at hand. These were all the sights and sounds of life that encountered me when I entered the square.

I walked at once to the door of Number Thirteen—the number of Mrs. Catherick's house—and knocked, without waiting to consider beforehand how I might best present myself when I got in. The first necessity was to see Mrs. Catherick. I could then judge, from my own observation, of the safest and easiest manner of approaching the object of my visit.

The door was opened by a melancholy middle-aged woman servant. I gave her my card, and asked if I could see Mrs. Catherick. The card was taken into the front parlour; and the servant returned with a message requesting me to mention what my business was.

'Say, if you please, that my business relates to Mrs. Catherick's daughter,' I replied. This was the best pretext I could think of, on the spur of the moment, to account for my visit.

The servant again retired to the parlour; again returned; and, this time, begged me, with a look of gloomy amazement, to walk in.

I entered a little room, with a flaring paper, of the largest pattern, on the walls. Chairs, tables, cheffonier, and sofa, all gleamed with the glutinous brightness of cheap upholstery. On the largest table, in the middle of the room, stood a smart Bible, placed exactly in the centre, on a red and yellow woollen mat; and at the side of the table nearest to the window, with a little knitting-basket on her lap, and a wheezing, blear-eyed old spaniel crouched at her feet, there sat an elderly

woman, wearing a black net cap and a black silk gown, and having slate-coloured mittens on her hands. Her iron-gray hair hung in heavy bands on either side of her face; her dark eyes looked straight forward, with a hard, defiant, implacable stare. She had full square cheeks; a long, firm chin; and thick, sensual, colourless lips. Her figure was stout and sturdy, and her manner aggressively self-possessed. This was Mrs. Catherick.

'You have come to speak to me about my daughter,' she said, before I could utter a word on my side. 'Be so good as to mention what you have to say.'

The tone of her voice was as hard, as defiant, as implacable as the expression of her eyes. She pointed to a chair, and looked me all over attentively, from head to foot, as I sat down in it. I saw that my only chance with this woman was to speak to her in her own tone, and to meet her, at the outset of our interview, on her own ground.

'You are aware,' I said, 'that your daughter has been lost?'

'I am perfectly aware of it.'

'Have you felt any apprehension that the misfortune of her loss might be followed by the misfortune of her death?'

'Yes. Have you come here to tell me she is dead?'

'I have.'

'Why?'

She put that extraordinary question without the slightest change in her voice, her face, or her manner. She could not have appeared more perfectly unconcerned if I had told her of the death of the goat in the enclosure outside.

'Why?' I repeated. 'Do you ask why I come here to tell you of your daughter's death?'

'Yes. What interest have you in me, or in her? How do you come to know anything about my daughter?'

'In this way. I met her on the night when she escaped from the Asylum; and I assisted her in reaching a place of safety.'

'You did very wrong.'

'I am sorry to hear her mother say so.'

'Her mother does say so. How do you know she is dead?'

'I am not at liberty to say how I know it—but I *do* know it.'

'Are you at liberty to say how you found out my address?'

'Certainly. I got your address from Mrs. Clements.'

'Mrs. Clements is a foolish woman. Did she tell you to come here?'

'She did not.'

'Then, I ask you again, why did you come?'

As she was determined to have her answer, I gave it to her in the plainest possible form.

'I came,' I said, 'because I thought Anne Catherick's mother might have some natural interest in knowing whether she was alive or dead.'

'Just so,' said Mrs. Catherick, with additional self-possession. 'Had you no other motive?

I hesitated. The right answer to that question was not easy to find, at a moment's notice.

'If you have no other motive,' she went on, deliberately taking off her slate-coloured mittens, and rolling them up, 'I have only to thank you for your visit; and to say that I will not detain you here any longer. Your information would be more satisfactory if you were willing to explain how you became possessed of it.

However, it justifies me, I suppose, in going into mourning. There is not much alteration necessary in my dress, as you see. When I have changed my mittens, I shall be all in black.'

She searched in the pocket of her gown; drew out a pair of black lace mittens; put them on with the stoniest and steadiest composure; and then quietly crossed her hands in her lap.

'I wish you good morning,' she said.

The cool contempt of her manner irritated me into directly avowing that the purpose of my visit had not been answered yet.

'I *have* another motive in coming here,' I said.

'Ah! I thought so,' remarked Mrs. Catherick.

'Your daughter's death——'

'What did she die of?'

'Of disease of the heart.'

'Yes. Go on.'

'Your daughter's death has been made the pretext for inflicting serious injury on a person who is very dear to me. Two men have been concerned, to my certain knowledge, in doing that wrong. One of them is Sir Percival Glyde.'

'Indeed!'

I looked attentively to see if she flinched at the sudden mention of that name. Not a muscle of her stirred—the hard, defiant, implacable stare in her eyes never wavered for an instant.

'You may wonder,' I went on, 'how the event of your daughter's death can have been made the means of inflicting injury on another person.'

'No,' said Mrs. Catherick; 'I don't wonder at all. This appears to be your affair. You are interested in my affairs. I am not interested in yours.'

'You may ask, then,' I persisted, 'why I mention the matter, in your presence.'

'Yes: I *do* ask that.'

'I mention it because I am determined to bring Sir Percival Glyde to account for the wickedness he has committed.'

'What have I to do with your determination?'

'You shall hear. There are certain events in Sir Percival's past life which it is necessary to my purpose to be fully acquainted with. *You* know them—and for that reason, I come to *you*.'

'What events do you mean?'

'Events that occurred at Old Welmingham, when your husband was parish-clerk at that place, and before the time when your daughter was born.'

I had reached the woman at last, through the barrier of impenetrable reserve that she had tried to set up between us. I saw her temper smouldering in her eyes —as plainly as I saw her hands grow restless, then unclasp themselves, and begin mechanically smoothing her dress over her knees.

'What do you know of those events?' she asked.

'All that Mrs. Clements could tell me,' I answered.

There was a momentary flush on her firm, square face, a momentary stillness in her restless hands, which seemed to betoken a coming outburst of anger that might throw her off her guard. But, no—she mastered the rising irritation; leaned back in her chair; crossed her arms on her broad bosom; and, with a smile of grim sarcasm on her thick lips, looked at me as steadily as ever.

'Ah! I begin to understand it all, now,' she said; her tamed and disciplined anger only expressing itself in the elaborate mockery of her tone and manner. 'You have

got a grudge of your own against Sir Percival Glyde—and I must help you to wreak it. I must tell you this, that, and the other about Sir Percival and myself, must I? Yes, indeed? You have been prying into my private affairs. You think you have found a lost woman to deal with, who lives here on sufferance; and who will do anything you ask, for fear you may injure her in the opinions of the townspeople. I see through you and your precious speculation—I do! and it amuses me. Ha! ha!

She stopped for a moment: her arms tightened over her bosom, and she laughed to herself—a hard, harsh, angry laugh.

'You don't know how I have lived in this place, and what I have done in this place, Mr. What's-your-name,' she went on. 'I'll tell you, before I ring the bell and have you shown out. I came here a wronged woman. I came here robbed of my character and determined to claim it back. I've been years and years about it—and I *have* claimed it back. I have matched the respectable people fairly and openly, on their own ground. If they say anything against me, now, they must say it in secret: they can't say it, they daren't say it, openly. I stand high enough in this town to be out of your reach. *The clergyman bows to me.* Aha! you didn't bargain for that, when you came here. Go to the church, and inquire about me—you will find Mrs. Catherick has her sitting, like the rest of them, and pays the rent on the day it's due. Go to the town-hall. There's a petition lying there; a petition of the respectable inhabitants against allowing a Circus to come and perform here and corrupt our morals: yes! OUR morals. I signed that petition this morning. Go to the bookseller's shop. The clergyman's Wednesday evening

Lectures on Justification by Faith are publishing there by subscription—I'm down on the list. The doctor's wife only put a shilling in the plate at our last charity sermon—I put half a crown. Mr. Churchwarden Soward held the plate, and bowed to me. Ten years ago he told Pigrum, the chemist, I ought to be whipped out of the town, at the cart's tail. Is your mother alive? Has she got a better Bible on her table than I have got on mine? Does she stand better with her tradespeople than I do with mine? Has she always lived within her income? I have always lived within mine.—Ah! there *is* the clergyman coming along the square. Look, Mr. What's-your-name—look, if you please!'

She started up with the activity of a young woman; went to the window; waited till the clergyman passed; and bowed to him solemnly. The clergyman ceremoniously raised his hat, and walked on. Mrs. Catherick returned to her chair, and looked at me with a grimmer sarcasm than ever.

'There!' she said. 'What do you think of that for a woman with a lost character? How does your speculation look now?'

The singular manner in which she had chosen to assert herself, the extraordinary practical vindication of her position in the town which she had just offered, had so perplexed me, that I listened to her in silent surprise. I was not the less resolved, however, to make another effort to throw her off her guard. If the woman's fierce temper once got beyond her control, and once flamed out on me, she might yet say the words which would put the clue in my hands.

'How does your speculation look now?' she repeated.

'Exactly as it looked when I first came in,' I answered.

'I don't doubt the position you have gained in the town; and I don't wish to assail it, even if I could. I came here because Sir Percival Glyde is, to my certain knowledge, your enemy, as well as mine. If I have a grudge against him, you have a grudge against him too. You may deny it, if you like; you may distrust me as much as you please; you may be as angry as you will—but, of all the women in England, you, if you have any sense of injury, are the woman who ought to help me to crush that man.'

'Crush him for yourself,' she said—'then come back here, and see what I say to you.'

She spoke those words, as she had not spoken yet—quickly, fiercely, vindictively. I had stirred in its lair the serpent-hatred of years—but only for a moment. Like a lurking reptile, it leapt up at me—as she eagerly bent forward towards the place in which I was sitting. Like a lurking reptile, it dropped out of sight again—as she instantly resumed her former position in the chair.

'You won't trust me?' I said.

'No.'

'You are afraid.'

'Do I look as if I was?'

'You are afraid of Sir Percival Glyde.'

'Am I?'

Her colour was rising, and her hands were at work again, smoothing her gown. I pressed the point farther and farther home—I went on, without allowing her a moment of delay.

'Sir Percival has a high position in the world,' I said; 'it would be no wonder if you were afraid of him. Sir Percival is a powerful man—a baronet—the possessor of a fine estate—the descendant of a great family——'

She amazed me beyond expression by suddenly bursting out laughing.

'Yes,' she repeated, in tones of the bitterest, steadiest contempt. 'A baronet—the possessor of a fine estate—the descendant of a great family. Yes, indeed! A great family—especially by the mother's side.'

There was no time to reflect on the words that had just escaped her; there was only time to feel that they were well worth thinking over the moment I left the house.

'I am not here to dispute with you about family questions,' I said. 'I know nothing of Sir Percival's mother——'

'And you know as little of Sir Percival himself,' she interposed, sharply.

'I advise you not to be too sure of that,' I rejoined. 'I know some things about him—and I suspect many more.'

'What do you suspect?'

'I'll tell you what I *don't* suspect. I *don't* suspect him of being Anne's father.'

She started to her feet, and came close up to me with a look of fury.

'How dare you talk to me about Anne's father! How dare you say who was her father, or who wasn't! she broke out, her face quivering, her voice trembling with passion.

'The secret between you and Sir Percival is not *that* secret,' I persisted. 'The mystery which darkens Sir Percival's life was not born with your daughter's birth, and has not died with your daughter's death.'

She drew back a step. 'Go!' she said, and pointed sternly to the door.

'There was no thought of the child in your heart or in his,' I went on, determined to press her back to her

last defences. 'There was no bond of guilty love between you and him, when you held those stolen meetings—when your husband found you whispering together under the vestry of the church.'

Her pointing hand instantly dropped to her side, and the deep flush of anger faded from her face while I spoke. I saw the change pass over her; I saw that hard, firm, fearless, self-possessed woman quail under a terror which her utmost resolution was not strong enough to resist—when I said those last five words, 'the vestry of the church.'

For a minute, or more, we stood looking at each other in silence. I spoke first.

'Do you still refuse to trust me?' I asked.

She could not call the colour that had left it back to her face—but she had steadied her voice, she had recovered the defiant self-possession of her manner when she answered me.

'I do refuse,' she said.

'Do you still tell me to go?'

'Yes. Go—and never come back.'

I walked to the door, waited a moment before I opened it, and turned round to look at her again.

'I may have news to bring you of Sir Percival which you don't expect,' I said; 'and in that case, I shall come back.'

'There is no news of Sir Percival that I don't expect, except——'

She stopped; her pale face darkened; and she stole back, with a quiet, stealthy, cat-like step to her chair.

'Except the news of his death,' she said, sitting down again, with the mockery of a smile just hovering on her cruel lips, and the furtive light of hatred lurking deep in her steady eyes.

As I opened the door of the room to go out, she looked round at me quickly. The cruel smile slowly widened her lips—she eyed me with a strange, stealthy interest, from head to foot—an unutterable expectation showed itself wickedly all over her face. Was she speculating, in the secrecy of her own heart, on my youth and strength, on the force of my sense of injury and the limits of my self-control; and was she considering the lengths to which they might carry me, if Sir Percival and I ever chanced to meet? The bare doubt that it might be so, drove me from her presence, and silenced even the common forms of farewell on my lips. Without a word more, on my side or on hers, I left the room.

As I opened the outer door, I saw the same clergyman who had already passed the house once, about to pass it again, on his way back through the square. I waited on the door-step to let him go by, and looked round, as I did so, at the parlour window.

Mrs. Catherick had heard his footsteps approaching, in the silence of that lonely place; and she was on her feet at the window again, waiting for him. Not all the strength of all the terrible passions I had roused in that woman's heart, could loosen her desperate hold on the one fragment of social consideration which years of resolute effort had just dragged within her grasp. There she was again, not a minute after I had left her, placed purposely in a position which made it a matter of common courtesy on the part of the clergyman to bow to her for a second time. He raised his hat, once more. I saw the hard ghastly face, behind the window, soften, and light up with gratified pride; I saw the head with the grim black cap bend ceremoniously in return. The clergyman had bowed to her—and in my presence—twice in one day!

IX.

I left the house, feeling that Mrs. Catherick had helped me a step forward, in spite of herself. Before I had reached the turning which led out of the square, my attention was suddenly aroused by the sound of a closing door behind me.

I looked round, and saw an undersized man in black, on the door-step of a house, which, as well as I could judge, stood next to Mrs. Catherick's place of abode—next to it, on the side nearest to me. The man did not hesitate a moment about the direction he should take. He advanced rapidly towards the turning at which I had stopped. I recognised him as the lawyer's clerk who had preceded me in my visit to Blackwater Park, and who had tried to pick a quarrel with me, when I asked him if I could see the house.

I waited where I was, to ascertain whether his object was to come to close quarters and speak, on this occasion. To my surprise, he passed on rapidly, without saying a word, without even looking up in my face as he went by. This was such a complete inversion of the course of proceeding which I had every reason to expect on his part, that my curiosity, or rather my suspicion, was aroused, and I determined, on my side, to keep him cautiously in view, and to discover what the business might be on which he was now employed. Without caring whether he saw me or not, I walked after him. He never looked back; and he led me straight through the streets to the railway station.

The train was on the point of starting, and two or three passengers who were late were clustering round the small opening through which the tickets were issued.

I joined them, and distinctly heard the lawyer's clerk demand a ticket for the Blackwater station. I satisfied myself that he had actually left by the train, before I came away.

There was only one interpretation that I could place on what I had just seen and heard. I had unquestionably observed the man leaving a house which closely adjoined Mrs. Catherick's residence. He had been probably placed there, by Sir Percival's directions, as a lodger, in anticipation of my inquiries leading me, sooner or later, to communicate with Mrs. Catherick. He had doubtless seen me go in and come out; and he had hurried away by the first train to make his report at Blackwater Park—to which place Sir Percival would naturally betake himself (knowing what he evidently knew of my movements), in order to be ready on the spot, if I returned to Hampshire. Before many days were over, there seemed every likelihood, now, that he and I might meet.

Whatever result events might be destined to produce, I resolved to pursue my own course, straight to the end in view, without stopping or turning aside, for Sir Percival or for any one. The great responsibility which weighed on me heavily in London—the responsibility of so guiding my slightest actions as to prevent them from leading accidentally to the discovery of Laura's place of refuge—was removed, now that I was in Hampshire. I could go and come as I pleased, at Welmingham; and if I chanced to fail in observing any necessary precautions, the immediate results, at least, would affect no one but myself.

When I left the station, the winter evening was beginning to close in. There was little hope of continuing my inquiries after dark to any useful purpose, in a

neighbourhood that was strange to me. Accordingly, I made my way to the nearest hotel, and ordered my dinner and my bed. This done, I wrote to Marian, to tell her that I was safe and well, and that I had fair prospects of success. I had directed her, on leaving home, to address the first letter she wrote to me (the letter I expected to receive the next morning) to 'The Post Office, Welmingham;' and I now begged her to send her second day's letter to the same address. I could easily receive it, by writing to the postmaster, if I happened to be away from the town when it arrived.

The coffee-room of the hotel, as it grew late in the evening, became a perfect solitude. I was left to reflect on what I had accomplished that afternoon, as uninterruptedly as if the house had been my own. Before I retired to rest, I had attentively thought over my extraordinary interview with Mrs. Catherick, from beginning to end; and had verified, at my leisure, the conclusions which I had hastily drawn in the earlier part of the day.

The vestry of Old Welmingham church was the starting-point from which my mind slowly worked its way back through all that I had heard Mrs. Catherick say, and through all I had seen Mrs. Catherick do.

At the time when the neighbourhood of the vestry was first referred to in my presence by Mrs. Clements, I had thought it the strangest and most unaccountable of all places for Sir Percival to select for a clandestine meeting with the clerk's wife. Influenced by this impression, and by no other, I had mentioned 'the vestry of the church,' before Mrs. Catherick, on pure speculation—it represented one of the minor peculiarities of the story, which occurred to me while I was speaking. I was prepared for her answering me confusedly, or angrily; but the blank terror that seized

her, when I said the words, took me completely by surprise. I had, long before, associated Sir Percival's Secret with the concealment of a serious crime, which Mrs. Catherick knew of—but I had gone no farther than this. Now, the woman's paroxysm of terror associated the crime, either directly or indirectly, with the vestry, and convinced me that she had been more than the mere witness of it—she was also the accomplice, beyond a doubt.

What had been the nature of the crime? Surely there was a contemptible side to it, as well as a dangerous side—or Mrs. Catherick would not have repeated my own words, referring to Sir Percival's rank and power, with such marked disdain as she had certainly displayed. It was a contemptible crime, then, and a dangerous crime; and she had shared in it, and it was associated with the vestry of the church.

The next consideration to be disposed of led me a step farther from this point.

Mrs. Catherick's undisguised contempt for Sir Percival plainly extended to his mother as well. She had referred, with the bitterest sarcasm, to the great family he had descended from—'especially by the mother's side.' What did this mean? There appeared to be only two explanations of it. Either his mother's birth had been low? or his mother's reputation was damaged by some hidden flaw with which Mrs. Catherick and Sir Percival were both privately acquainted? I could only put the first explanation to the test by looking at the register of her marriage, and so ascertaining her maiden name and her parentage, as a preliminary to further inquiries.

On the other hand, if the second case supposed were the true one, what had been the flaw in her reputation?

Remembering the account which Marian had given me of Sir Percival's father and mother, and of the suspiciously unsocial secluded life they had both led, I now asked myself, whether it might not be possible that his mother had never been married at all. Here, again, the register might, by offering written evidence of the marriage, prove to me, at any rate, that this doubt had no foundation in truth. But where was the register to be found? At this point, I took up the conclusions which I had previously formed; and the same mental process which had discovered the locality of the concealed crime, now lodged the register, also, in the vestry of Old Welmingham church.

These were the results of my interview with Mrs. Catherick—these were the various considerations, all steadily converging to one point, which decided the course of my proceedings on the next day.

The morning was cloudy and lowering, but no rain fell. I left my bag at the hotel, to wait there till I called for it; and, after inquiring the way, set forth on foot for Old Welmingham church.

It was a walk of rather more than two miles, the ground rising slowly all the way.

On the highest point stood the church—an ancient, weather-beaten building, with heavy buttresses at its sides, and a clumsy square tower in front. The vestry, at the back, was built out from the church, and seemed to be of the same age. Round the building, at intervals, appeared the remains of the village which Mrs. Clements had described to me as her husband's place of abode in former years, and which the principal inhabitants had long since deserted for the new town. Some of the empty houses had been dismantled to their outer

walls; some had been left to decay with time; and some were still inhabited by persons evidently of the poorest class. It was a dreary scene—and yet, in the worst aspect of its ruin, not so dreary as the modern town that I had just left. Here, there was the brown, breezy sweep of surrounding fields for the eye to repose on; here the trees, leafless as they were, still varied the monotony of the prospect, and helped the mind to look forward to summer-time and shade.

As I moved away from the back of the church, and passed some of the dismantled cottages in search of a person who might direct me to the clerk, I saw two men saunter out after me, from behind a wall. The tallest of the two—a stout muscular man in the dress of a gamekeeper—was a stranger to me. The other was one of the men who had followed me in London, on the day when I left Mr. Kyrle's office. I had taken particular notice of him at the time; and I felt sure that I was not mistaken in identifying the fellow on this occasion.

Neither he nor his companion attempted to speak to me, and both kept themselves at a respectful distance—but the motive of their presence in the neighbourhood of the church was plainly apparent. It was exactly as I had supposed—Sir Percival was already prepared for me. My visit to Mrs. Catherick had been reported to him the evening before; and those two men had been placed on the look-out, near the church, in anticipation of my appearance at Old Welmingham. If I had wanted any further proof that my investigations had taken the right direction at last, the plan now adopted for watching me would have supplied it.

I walked on, away from the church, till I reached one of the inhabited houses, with a patch of kitchen garden attached to it, on which a labourer was at work. He

directed me to the clerk's abode—a cottage, at some little distance off, standing by itself on the outskirts of the forsaken village. The clerk was in-doors, and was just putting on his greatcoat. He was a cheerful, familiar, loudly-talkative old man, with a very poor opinion (as I soon discovered) of the place in which he lived, and a happy sense of superiority to his neighbours in virtue of the great personal distinction of having once been in London.

'It's well you came so early, sir,' said the old man, when I had mentioned the object of my visit. 'I should have been away in ten minutes more. Parish business, sir—and a goodish long trot before it's all done, for a man at my age. But, bless you, I'm strong on my legs, still! As long as a man don't give at his legs, there's a deal of work left in him. Don't you think so, yourself, sir?'

He took his keys down, while he was talking, from a hook behind the fireplace, and locked his cottage door behind us.

'Nobody at home to keep house for me,' said the clerk, with a cheerful sense of perfect freedom from all family encumbrances. 'My wife's in the churchyard, there; and my children are all married. A wretched place this, isn't it, sir? But the parish is a large one—every man couldn't get through the business as I do. It's learning does it; and I've had my share, and a little more. I can talk the Queen's English (God bless the Queen!)—and that's more than most of the people about here can do. You're from London, I suppose, sir? I've been in London, a matter of five-and-twenty year ago. What's the news there, now, if you please?'

Chattering on in this way, he led me back to the vestry. I looked about, to see if the two spies were still

in sight. They were not visible anywhere. After having discovered my application to the clerk, they had probably concealed themselves where they could watch my next proceedings in perfect freedom.

The vestry door was of stout old oak, studded with strong nails; and the clerk put his large heavy key into the lock, with the air of a man who knew that he had a difficulty to encounter, and who was not quite certain of creditably conquering it.

'I'm obliged to bring you this way, sir,' he said, 'because the door from the vestry to the church is bolted on the vestry side. We might have got in through the church, otherwise. This is a perverse lock, if ever there was one yet. It's big enough for a prison-door; it's been hampered over and over again; and it ought to be changed for a new one. I've mentioned that to the churchwarden fifty times over at least; he's always saying. "I'll see about it"—and he never does see. Ah, it's a sort of lost corner, this place. Not like London—is it, sir? Bless you, we are all asleep here! *We* don't march with the times.'

After some twisting and turning of the key, the heavy lock yielded; and he opened the door.

The vestry was larger than I should have supposed it to be, judging from the outside only. It was a dim, mouldy, melancholy old room, with a low, raftered ceiling. Round two sides of it, the sides nearest to the interior of the church, ran heavy wooden presses, worm-eaten and gaping with age. Hooked to the inner corner of one of these presses hung several surplices, all bulging out at their lower ends in an irreverent-looking bundle of limp drapery. Below the surplices, on the floor, stood three packing-cases, with the lids half off, half on, and the straw profusely bursting out of their

cracks and crevices in every direction. Behind them, in a corner, was a litter of dusty papers, some large and rolled up, like architects' plans; some loosely strung together on files, like bills or letters. The room had once been lighted by a small side window; but this had been bricked up, and a lantern skylight was now substituted for it. The atmosphere of the place was heavy and mouldy; being rendered additionally oppressive by the closing of the door which led into the church. This door also was composed of solid oak, and was bolted, at top and bottom, on the vestry side.

'We might be tidier, mightn't we, sir?' said the cheerful clerk. 'But when you're in a lost corner of a place like this, what are you to do? Why, look here, now—just look at these packing cases. There they've been, for a year or more, ready to go down to London—there they are, littering the place—and there they'll stop as long as the nails hold them together. I'll tell you what, sir, as I said before, this is not London. We are all asleep here. Bless you, *we* don't march with the times!'

'What is there in the packing-cases?' I asked.

'Bits of old wood carvings from the pulpit, and panels from the chancel, and images from the organ-loft,' said the clerk. 'Portraits of the twelve apostles in wood—and not a whole nose among 'em. All broken, and worm-eaten, and crumbling to dust at the edges—as brittle as crockery, sir, and as old as the church, if not older.'

'And why were they going to London? To be repaired?'

'That's it, sir. To be repaired; and where they were past repair, to be copied in sound wood. But, bless you, the money fell short—and there they are, waiting for new

subscriptions, and nobody to subscribe. It was all done a year ago, sir. Six gentlemen dined together about it, at the hotel in the new town. They made speeches, and passed resolutions, and put their names down, and printed off thousands of prospectuses. Beautiful prospectuses, sir, all flourished over with Gothic devices in red ink, saying it was a disgrace not to restore the church and repair the famous carvings, and so on. There are the prospectuses that couldn't be distributed, and the architects' plans and estimates, and the whole correspondence which set everybody at loggerheads and ended in a dispute, all down together in that corner, behind the packing-cases. The money dribbled in a little at first—but what *can* you expect out of London? There was just enough, you know, to pack the broken carvings, and get the estimates, and pay the printer's bill—and after that, there wasn't a half-penny left. There the things are, as I said before. We have nowhere else to put them—nobody in the new town cares about accommodating *us*—we're in a lost corner—and this is an untidy vestry—and who's to help it?—that's what I want to know.'

My anxiety to examine the register did not dispose me to offer much encouragement to the old man's talkativeness. I agreed with him that nobody could help the untidiness of the vestry—and then suggested that we should proceed to our business without more delay.

'Ay, ay, the marriage register, to be sure,' said the clerk, taking a little bunch of keys from his pocket. 'How far do you want to look back, sir?'

Marian had informed me of Sir Percival's age, at the time when we had spoken together of his marriage engagement with Laura. She had then described him

as being forty-five years old. Calculating back from this, and making due allowance for the year that had passed since I had gained my information, I found that he must have been born in eighteen hundred and four, and that I might safely start on my search through the register from that date.

'I want to begin with the year eighteen hundred and four,' I said.

'Which way after that, sir?' asked the clerk. 'Forwards to our time, or backwards away from us.'

'Backwards from eighteen hundred and four.'

He opened the door of one of the presses—the press from the side of which the surplices were hanging—and produced a large volume bound in greasy brown leather. I was struck by the insecurity of the place in which the register was kept. The door of the press was warped and cracked with age; and the lock was of the smallest and commonest kind. I could have forced it easily with the walking-stick I carried in my hand.

'Is that considered a sufficiently secure place for the register?' I inquired. 'Surely, a book of such importance as this ought to be protected by a better lock, and kept carefully in an iron safe.'

'Well, now, that's curious!' said the clerk, shutting up the book again, just after he had opened it, and smacking his hand cheerfully on the cover. 'Those were the very words my old master was always saying years and years ago, when I was a lad. "Why isn't the register" (meaning this register here, under my hand)—"why isn't it kept in an iron safe?" If I've heard him say that once, I've heard him say it a hundred times. He was the solicitor, in those days, sir, who had the appointment of vestry-clerk to this church. A fine hearty old gentleman—and the most particular man breathing.

As long as he lived, he kept a copy of this book, in his office at Knowlesbury, and had it posted up regular, from time to time, to correspond with the fresh entries here. You would hardly think it, but he had his own appointed days, once or twice, in every quarter, for riding over to this church on his old white pony to check the copy, by the register, with his own eyes and hands. "How do I know" (he used to say)—"how do I know that the register in this vestry may not be stolen or destroyed? Why isn't it kept in an iron safe? Why can't I make other people as careful as I am myself? Some of these days there will be an accident happen—and when the register's lost, then the parish will find out the value of my copy." He used to take his pinch of snuff after that, and look about him as bold as a lord. Ah! the like of him for doing business isn't easy to find now. You may go to London, and not match him, even *there*. Which year did you say, sir? Eighteen hundred and what?'

'Eighteen hundred and four,' I replied; mentally resolving to give the old man no more opportunities of talking, until my examination of the register was over.

The clerk put on his spectacles, and turned over the leaves of the register, carefully wetting his finger and thumb at every third page. 'There it is, sir,' he said, with another cheerful smack on the open volume. 'There's the year you want.'

As I was ignorant of the month in which Sir Percival was born, I began my backward search with the early part of the year. The register-book was of the old-fashioned kind; the entries being all made on blank pages, in manuscript, and the divisions which separated them being indicated by ink lines drawn across the page, at the close of each entry.

I reached the beginning of the year eighteen hundred and four, without encountering the marriage; and then travelled back through December, eighteen hundred and three; through November, and October; through——

No! not through September also. Under the heading of that month in the year, I found the marriage.

I looked carefully at the entry. It was at the bottom of a page, and was, for want of room, compressed into a smaller space than that occupied by the marriages above. The marriage immediately before it was impressed on my attention by the circumstance of the bridegroom's Christian name being the same as my own. The entry immediately following it (on the top of the next page) was noticeable, in another way, from the large space it occupied; the record, in this case, registering the marriages of two brothers at the same time. The register of the marriage of Sir Felix Glyde was in no respect remarkable, except for the narrowness of the space into which it was compressed at the bottom of the page. The information about his wife, was the usual information given in such cases. She was described as 'Cecilia Jane Elster, of Park View Cottages, Knowlesbury; only daughter of the late Patrick Elster, Esq., formerly of Bath.'

I noted down these particulars in my pocket-book, feeling, as I did so, both doubtful and disheartened about my next proceedings. The Secret, which I had believed, until this moment, to be within my grasp, seemed now farther from my reach than ever.

What suggestions of any mystery unexplained had arisen out of my visit to the vestry? I saw no suggestions anywhere. What progress had I made towards discovering the suspected stain on the reputation of

Sir Percival's mother? The one fact I had ascertained, vindicated her reputation. Fresh doubts, fresh difficulties, fresh delays, began to open before me in interminable prospect. What was I to do next? The one immediate resource left to me, appeared to be this. I might institute inquiries about 'Miss Elster, of Knowlesbury,' on the chance of advancing towards the main object of my investigation, by first discovering the secret of Mrs. Catherick's contempt for Sir Percival's mother.

'Have you found what you wanted, sir?' said the clerk, as I closed the register-book.

'Yes,' I replied; 'but I have some inquiries still to make. I suppose the clergyman who officiated here in the year eighteen hundred and three is no longer alive?'

'No, no, sir; he was dead three or four years before I came here—and that was as long ago as the year twenty-seven. I got this place, sir,' persisted my talkative old friend, 'through the clerk before me leaving it. They say he was driven out of house and home by his wife—and she's living still, down in the new town there. I don't know the rights of the story myself; all I know is, I got the place. Mr. Wansborough got it for me—the son of my old master that I was telling you of. He's a free pleasant gentleman as ever lived; rides to the hounds, keeps his pointers, and all that. He's vestry-clerk here now, as his father was before him.'

'Did you not tell me your former master lived at Knowlesbury?' I asked, calling to mind the long story about the precise gentleman of the old school, with which my talkative friend had wearied me before he opened the register-book.

'Yes, to be sure, sir,' replied the clerk. 'Old Mr.

Wansborough lived at Knowlesbury; and young Mr. Wansborough lives there too.'

'You said just now he was vestry-clerk, like his father before him. I am not quite sure that I know what a vestry-clerk is.'

'Don't you indeed, sir?—and you come from London, too! Every parish church, you know, has a vestry-clerk and a parish-clerk. The parish-clerk is a man like me (except that I've got a deal more learning than most of them—though I don't boast of it). The vestry-clerk is a sort of an appointment that the lawyers get; and if there's any business to be done for the vestry, why there they are to do it. It's just the same in London. Every parish church there has got its vestry-clerk—and, you may take my word for it, he's sure to be a lawyer.'

'Then, young Mr. Wansborough is a lawyer, I suppose?'

'Of course he is, sir! A lawyer in High Street, Knowlesbury—the old offices that his father had before him. The number of times I've swept those offices out, and seen the old gentleman come trotting in to business on his white pony, looking right and left all down the street, and nodding to everybody! Bless you, he was a popular character!—he'd have done in London!'

'How far is it to Knowlesbury from this place?'

'A long stretch, sir,' said the clerk, with that exaggerated idea of distances and that vivid perception of difficulties in getting from place to place, which is peculiar to all country people. 'Nigh on five mile, I can tell you!'

It was still early in the forenoon. There was plenty of time for a walk to Knowlesbury, and back again to Welmingham; and there was no person probably in

the town who was fitter to assist my inquiries about the character and position of Sir Percival's mother, before her marriage, than the local solicitor. Resolving to go at once to Knowlesbury on foot, I led the way out of the vestry.

'Thank you kindly, sir,' said the clerk, as I slipped my little present into his hand. 'Are you really going to walk all the way to Knowlesbury and back? Well! you're strong on your legs, too—and what a blessing that is, isn't it? There's the road; you can't miss it. I wish I was going your way—it's pleasant to meet with gentlemen from London, in a lost corner like this. One hears the news. Wish you good morning, sir—and thank you kindly once more.'

We parted. As I left the church behind me, I looked back—and there were the two men again, on the road below, with a third in their company; that third person being the short man in black, whom I had traced to the railway the evening before.

The three stood talking together for a little while—then separated. The man in black went away by himself towards Welmingham; the other two remained together, evidently waiting to follow me, as soon as I walked on.

I proceeded on my way, without letting the fellows see that I took any special notice of them. They caused me no conscious irritation of feeling at that moment—on the contrary, they rather revived my sinking hopes. In the surprise of discovering the evidence of the marriage, I had forgotten the inference I had drawn, on first perceiving the men in the neighbourhood of the vestry. Their reappearance reminded me that Sir Percival had anticipated my visit to Old Welmingham church, as the next result of my interview with Mrs. Catherick—other-

wise, he would never have placed his spies there to wait for me. Smoothly and fairly as appearances looked in the vestry, there was something wrong beneath them—there was something in the register-book, for aught I knew, that I had not discovered yet.

X.

Once out of sight of the church, I pressed forward briskly on my way to Knowlesbury.

The road was, for the most part, straight and level. Whenever I looked back over it, I saw the two spies, steadily following me. For the greater part of the way, they kept at a safe distance behind. But, once or twice, they quickened their pace, as if with the purpose of overtaking me—then stopped—consulted together—and fell back again to their former position. They had some special object evidently in view; and they seemed to be hesitating, or differing, about the best means of accomplishing it. I could not guess exactly what their design might be; but I felt serious doubts of reaching Knowlesbury without some mischance happening to me on the way. Those doubts were realized.

I had just entered on a lonely part of the road, with a sharp turn at some distance ahead, and had just concluded (calculating by time) that I must be getting near to the town, when I suddenly heard the steps of the men close behind me.

Before I could look round, one of them (the man by whom I had been followed in London) passed rapidly on my left side, and hustled me with his shoulder. I had been more irritated by the manner in which he and his companion had dogged my steps all the way from Old Welmingham than I was myself aware of;

and I unfortunately pushed the fellow away smartly with my open hand. He instantly shouted for help. His companion, the tall man in the game-keeper's clothes, sprang to my right side—and the next moment the two scoundrels held me pinioned between them in the middle of the road.

The conviction that a trap had been laid for me, and the vexation of knowing that I had fallen into it, fortunately restrained me from making my position still worse by an unavailing struggle with two men—one of whom would in all probability have been more than a match for me, single handed. I repressed the first natural movement by which I had attempted to shake them off, and looked about to see if there was any person near to whom I could appeal.

A labourer was at work in an adjoining field, who must have witnessed all that had passed: I called to him to follow us to the town. He shook his head with stolid obstinacy, and walked away, in the direction of a cottage which stood back from the high road. At the same time the men who held me between them declared their intention of charging me with an assault. I was cool enough and wise enough, now, to make no opposition. 'Drop your hold of my arms,' I said, 'and I will go with you to the town.' The man in the game-keeper's dress roughly refused. But the shorter man was sharp enough to look to consequences, and not to let his companion commit himself by unnecessary violence. He made a sign to the other, and I walked on between them, with my arms free.

We reached the turning in the road; and there, close before us, were the suburbs of Knowlesbury. One of the local policemen was walking along the path by the roadside. The men at once appealed to him. He

replied that the magistrate was then sitting at the town-hall; and recommended that we should appear before him immediately.

We went on to the town-hall. The clerk made out a formal summons; and the charge was preferred against me, with the customary exaggeration and the customary perversion of the truth, on such occasions. The magistrate (an ill-tempered man, with a sour enjoyment in the exercise of his own power) inquired if any one on, or near, the road had witnessed the assault; and, greatly to my surprise, the complainant admitted the presence of the labourer in the field. I was enlightened, however, as to the object of the admission, by the magistrate's next words. He remanded me, at once, for the production of the witness; expressing, at the same time, his willingness to take bail for my reappearance, if I could produce one responsible surety to offer it. If I had been known in the town, he would have liberated me on my own recognisances; but, as I was a total stranger, it was necessary that I should find responsible bail.

The whole object of the stratagem was now disclosed to me. It had been so managed as to make a remand necessary in a town where I was a perfect stranger, and where I could not hope to get my liberty on bail. The remand merely extended over three days, until the next sitting of the magistrate. But, in that time, while I was in confinement, Sir Percival might use any means he pleased to embarrass my future proceedings—perhaps to screen himself from detection altogether—without the slightest fear of any hindrance on my part. At the end of the three days, the charge would, no doubt, be withdrawn; and the attendance of the witness would be perfectly useless.

My indignation, I may almost say my despair, at this mischievous check to all further progress—so base and trifling in itself, and yet so disheartening and so serious in its probable results—quite unfitted me, at first, to reflect on the best means of extricating myself from the dilemma in which I now stood. I had the folly to call for writing materials, and to think of privately communicating my real position to the magistrate. The hopelessness and the imprudence of this proceeding failed to strike me before I had actually written the opening lines of the letter. It was not till I had pushed the paper away—not till, I am ashamed to say, I had almost allowed the vexation of my helpless position to conquer me—that a course of action suddenly occurred to my mind, which Sir Percival had probably not anticipated, and which might set me free again in a few hours. I determined to communicate the situation in which I was placed to Mr. Dawson, of Oak Lodge.

I had visited this gentleman's house, it may be remembered, at the time of my first inquiries in the Blackwater Park neighbourhood; and I had presented to him a letter of introduction from Miss Halcombe, in which she recommended me to his friendly attention in the strongest terms. I now wrote, referring to this letter, and to what I had previously told Mr. Dawson of the delicate and dangerous nature of my inquiries. I had not revealed to him the truth about Laura; having merely described my errand as being of the utmost importance to private family interests with which Miss Halcombe was concerned. Using the same caution still, I now accounted for my presence at Knowlesbury in the same manner—and I put it to the doctor to say whether the trust reposed in me by a lady whom he well knew, and the hospitality I had myself received

in his house, justified me or not in asking him to come to my assistance in a place where I was quite friendless.

I obtained permission to hire a messenger to drive away at once with my letter, in a conveyance which might be used to bring the doctor back immediately. Oak Lodge was on the Knowlesbury side of Blackwater. The man declared he could drive there in forty minutes, and could bring Mr. Dawson back in forty more. I directed him to follow the doctor wherever he might happen to be, if he was not at home—and then sat down to wait for the result with all the patience and all the hope that I could summon to help me.

It was not quite half-past one when the messenger departed. Before half-past three, he returned, and brought the doctor with him. Mr. Dawson's kindness, and the delicacy with which he treated his prompt assistance quite as a matter of course, almost overpowered me. The bail required was offered, and accepted immediately. Before four o'clock, on that afternoon, I was shaking hands warmly with the good old doctor—a free man again—in the streets of Knowlesbury.

Mr. Dawson hospitably invited me to go back with him to Oak Lodge, and take up my quarters there for the night. I could only reply that my time was not my own; and I could only ask him to let me pay my visit in a few days, when I might repeat my thanks, and offer to him all the explanations which I felt to be only his due, but which I was not then in a position to make. We parted with friendly assurances on both sides; and I turned my steps at once to Mr. Wansborough's office in the High Street.

Time was now of the last importance.

The news of my being free on bail would reach Sir

Percival, to an absolute certainty, before night. If the next few hours did not put me in a position to justify his worst fears, and to hold him helpless at my mercy, I might lose every inch of the ground I had gained, never to recover it again. The unscrupulous nature of the man, the local influence he possessed, the desperate peril of exposure with which my blindfold inquiries threatened him—all warned me to press on to positive discovery, without the useless waste of a single minute. I had found time to think, while I was waiting for Mr. Dawson's arrival; and I had well employed it. Certain portions of the conversation of the talkative old clerk, which had wearied me at the time, now recurred to my memory with a new significance; and a suspicion crossed my mind darkly, which had not occurred to me while I was in the vestry. On my way to Knowlesbury, I had only proposed to apply to Mr. Wansborough for information on the subject of Sir Percival's mother. My object, now, was to examine the duplicate register of Old Welmingham church.

Mr. Wansborough was in his office when I inquired for him.

He was a jovial, red-faced, easy-looking man—more like a country squire than a lawyer—and he seemed to be both surprised and amused by my application. He had heard of his father's copy of the register; but had not even seen it himself. It had never been inquired after—and it was no doubt in the strong room, among other papers that had not been disturbed since his father's death. It was a pity (Mr. Wansborough said) that the old gentleman was not alive to hear his precious copy asked for at last. He would have ridden his favourite hobby harder than ever, now. How had I come to hear of the copy? was it through anybody in the town?

I parried the question as well as I could. It was impossible at this stage of the investigation to be too cautious; and it was just as well not to let Mr. Wansborough know prematurely that I had already examined the original register. I described myself, therefore, as pursuing a family inquiry, to the object of which every possible saving of time was of great importance. I was anxious to send certain particulars to London by that day's post; and one look at the duplicate register (paying, of course, the necessary fees) might supply what I required, and save me a further journey to Old Welmingham. I added that, in the event of my subsequently requiring a copy of the original register, I should make application to Mr. Wansborough's office to furnish me with the document.

After this explanation, no objection was made to producing the copy. A clerk was sent to the strong room, and, after some delay, returned with the volume. It was of exactly the same size as the volume in the vestry, the only difference being that the copy was more smartly bound. I took it with me to an unoccupied desk. My hands were trembling—my head was burning hot—I felt the necessity of concealing my agitation as well as I could from the persons about me in the room, before I ventured on opening the book.

On the blank page at the beginning, to which I first turned, were traced some lines, in faded ink. They contained these words:

'Copy of the Marriage Register of Welmingham Parish Church. Executed under my orders; and afterwards compared, entry by entry, with the original, by myself. (Signed) Robert Wansborough, vestry-clerk.' Below this note, there was a line added, in another hand-

writing, as follows: 'Extending from the first of January, 1800, to the thirtieth of June, 1815.'

I turned to the month of September, eighteen hundred and three. I found the marriage of the man whose Christian name was the same as my own. I found the double register of the marriages of the two brothers. And between these entries, at the bottom of the page——?

Nothing! Not a vestige of the entry which recorded the marriage of Sir Felix Glyde and Cecilia Jane Elster, in the register of the church!

My heart gave a great bound, and throbbed as if it would stifle me. I looked again—I was afraid to believe the evidence of my own eyes. No! not a doubt. The marriage was not there. The entries on the copy occupied exactly the same places on the page as the entries in the original. The last entry on one page recorded the marriage of the man with my Christian name. Below it, there was a blank space—a space evidently left because it was too narrow to contain the entry of the marriages of the two brothers, which in the copy, as in the original, occupied the top of the next page. That space told the whole story! There it must have remained, in the church register, from eighteen hundred and three (when the marriages had been solemnised and the copy had been made) to eighteen hundred and twenty-seven, when Sir Percival appeared at Old Welmingham. Here, at Knowlesbury, was the chance of committing the forgery, shown to me in the copy—and there, at Old Welmingham, was the forgery committed, in the register of the church.

My head turned giddy; I held by the desk to keep myself from falling. Of all the suspicions which had struck me in relation to that desperate man, not one

had been near the truth. The idea that he was not Sir Percival Glyde at all, that he had no more claim to the baronetcy and to Blackwater Park than the poorest labourer who worked on the estate, had never once occurred to my mind. At one time I had thought he might be Anne's Catherick's father; at another time I had thought he might have been Anne Catherick's husband—the offence of which he was really guilty had been, from first to last, beyond the widest reach of my imagination.

The paltry means by which the fraud had been effected, the magnitude and daring of the crime that it represented, the horror of the consequences involved in its discovery, overwhelmed me. Who could wonder now at the brute-restlessness of the wretch's life; at his desperate alternations between abject duplicity and reckless violence; at the madness of guilty distrust which had made him imprison Anne Catherick in the Asylum, and had given him over to the vile conspiracy against his wife, on the bare suspicion that the one and the other knew his terrible secret? The disclosure of that secret might, in past years, have hanged him—might now transport him for life. The disclosure of that secret, even if the sufferers by his deception spared him the penalties of the law, would deprive him, at one blow, of the name, the rank, the estate, the whole social existence that he had usurped. This was the Secret, and it was mine! A word from me; and house, lands, baronetcy, were gone from him for ever—a word from me, and he was driven out into the world, a nameless, penniless, friendless outcast! The man's whole future hung on my lips—and he knew it by this time as certainly as I did!

That last thought steadied me. Interests far more

precious than my own, depended on the caution which must now guide my slightest actions. There was no possible treachery which Sir Percival might not attempt against me. In the danger and desperation of his position, he would be staggered by no risks, he would recoil at no crime—he would, literally, hesitate at nothing to save himself.

I considered for a minute. My first necessity was to secure positive evidence, in writing, of the discovery that I had just made, and, in the event of any personal misadventure happening to me, to place that evidence beyond Sir Percival's reach. The copy of the register was sure to be safe in Mr. Wansborough's strong room. But the position of the original, in the vestry, was, as I had seen with my own eyes, anything but secure.

In this emergency, I resolved to return to the church, to apply again to the clerk, and to take the necessary extract from the register, before I slept that night. I was not then aware that a legally-certified copy was necessary, and that no document merely drawn out by myself could claim the proper importance, as a proof. I was not aware of this; and my determination to keep my present proceedings a secret, prevented me from asking any questions which might have procured the necessary information. My one anxiety was the anxiety to get back to Old Welmingham. I made the best excuses I could for the discomposure in my face and manner, which Mr. Wansborough had already noticed; laid the necessary fee on his table; arranged that I should write to him in a day or two; and left the office with my head in a whirl, and my blood throbbing through my veins at fever heat.

It was just getting dark. The idea occurred to me that I might be followed again, and attacked on the high road.

My walking-stick was a light one, of little or no use for purposes of defence. I stopped, before leaving Knowlesbury, and bought a stout country cudgel, short, and heavy at the head. With this homely weapon, if any one man tried to stop me, I was a match for him. If more than one attacked me, I could trust to my heels. In my school-days, I had been a noted runner—and I had not wanted for practice since, in the later time of my experience in Central America.

I started from the town at a brisk pace, and kept the middle of the road.

A small misty rain was falling; and it was impossible, for the first half of the way, to make sure whether I was followed or not. But at the last half of my journey, when I supposed myself to be about two miles from the church, I saw a man run by me in the rain—and then heard the gate of a field by the roadside, shut to sharply. I kept straight on, with my cudgel ready in my hand, my ears on the alert, and my eyes straining to see through the mist and the darkness. Before I had advanced a hundred yards, there was a rustling in the hedge on my right, and three men sprang out into the road.

I drew aside on the instant to the footpath. The two foremost men were carried beyond me, before they could check themselves. The third was as quick as lightning. He stopped—half turned—and struck at me with his stick. The blow was aimed at hazard, and was not a severe one. It fell on my left shoulder. I returned it heavily on his head. He staggered back, and jostled his two companions, just as they were both rushing at me. This circumstance gave me a moment's start. I slipped by them, and took to the middle of the road again, at the top of my speed.

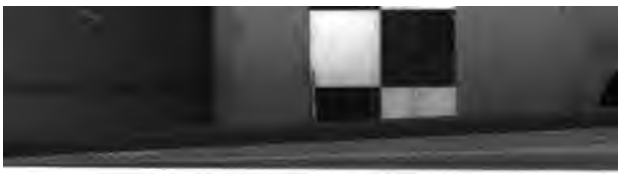
The two unhurt men pursued me. They were both

good runners; the road was smooth and level; and, for the first five minutes or more, I was conscious that I did not gain on them. It was perilous work to run for long in the darkness. I could barely see the dim black line of the hedges on either side; and any chance obstacle in the road would have thrown me down to a certainty. Ere long, I felt the ground changing: it descended from the level, at a turn, and then rose again beyond. Down-hill the men rather gained on me, but up-hill I began to distance them. The rapid, regular thump of their feet grew fainter on my ear; and I calculated by the sound that I was far enough in advance to take to the fields, with a good chance of their passing me in the darkness. Diverging to the footpath, I made for the first break that I could guess at, rather than see, in the hedge. It proved to be a closed gate. I vaulted over, and finding myself in a field, kept across it steadily, with my back to the road. I heard the men pass the gate, still running—then, in a minute more, heard one of them call to the other to come back. It was no matter what they did, now; I was out of their sight and out of their hearing. I kept straight across the field, and, when I had reached the further extremity of it, waited there for a minute to recover my breath.

It was impossible to venture back to the road; but I was determined, nevertheless, to get to Old Welmingham that evening.

Neither moon nor stars appeared to guide me. I only knew that I had kept the wind and rain at my back on leaving Knowlesbury—and if I now kept them at my back still, I might at least be certain of not advancing altogether in the wrong direction.

Proceeding on this plan, I crossed the country—meeting with no worse obstacles than hedges, ditches,



and thickets, which every now and then obliged me to alter my course for a little while—until I found myself on a hill-side, with the ground sloping away steeply before me. I descended to the bottom of the hollow, squeezed my way through a hedge, and got out into a lane. Having turned to the right on leaving the road, I now turned to the left, on the chance of regaining the line from which I had wandered. After following the muddy windings of the lane for ten minutes or more, I saw a cottage with a light in one of the windows. The garden gate was open to the lane; and I went in at once to inquire my way.

Before I could knock at the door, it was suddenly opened, and a man came running out with a lighted lantern in his hand. He stopped and held it up at the sight of me. We both started as we saw each other. My wanderings had led me round the outskirts of the village, and had brought me out at the lower end of it. I was back at Old Welmingham; and the man with the lantern was no other than my acquaintance of the morning, the parish-clerk.

His manner appeared to have altered strangely, in the interval since I had last seen him. He looked suspicious and confused; his ruddy cheeks were deeply flushed; and his first words, when he spoke, were quite unintelligible to me.

'Where are the keys?' he asked. 'Have you taken them?'

'What keys?' I repeated. 'I have this moment come from Knowlesbury. What keys do you mean?'

'The keys of the vestry. Lord save us and help us! what shall I do? The keys are gone! Do you hear?' cried the old man, shaking the lantern at me in his agitation; 'the keys are gone!'

'How? When? Who can have taken them?'

'I don't know,' said the clerk, staring about him wildly in the darkness. 'I've only just got back. I told you I had a long day's work this morning—I locked the door, and shut the window down—it's open now, the window's open. Look! somebody has got in there, and taken the keys.'

He turned to the casement window to show me that it was wide open. The door of the lantern came loose from its fastening as he swayed it round; and the wind blew the candle out instantly.

'Get another light,' I said; 'and let us both go to the vestry together. Quick! quick!'

I hurried him into the house. The treachery that I had every reason to expect, the treachery that might deprive me of every advantage I had gained, was, at that moment, perhaps, in process of accomplishment. My impatience to reach the church was so great, that I could not remain inactive in the cottage while the clerk lit the lantern again. I walked out, down the garden path, into the lane.

Before I had advanced ten paces, a man approached me from the direction leading to the church. He spoke respectfully as we met. I could not see his face; but, judging by his voice only, he was a perfect stranger to me.

'I beg your pardon, Sir Percival——' he began.

I stopped him before he could say more.

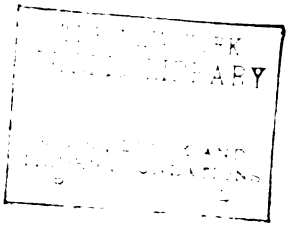
'The darkness misleads you,' I said. 'I am not Sir Percival.'

The man drew back directly.

'I thought it was my master,' he muttered, in a confused, doubtful way.

'You expected to meet your master here?'

He stopped and held up the lantern at the sight of me.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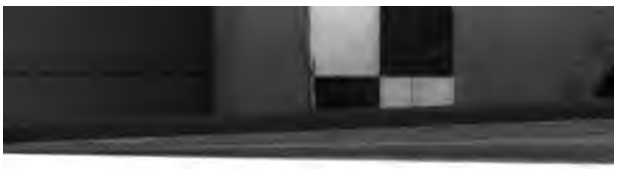


'I was told to wait in the lane.'

With that answer, he retraced his steps. I looked back at the cottage, and saw the clerk coming out, with the lantern lighted once more. I took the old man's arm to help him on the more quickly. We hastened along the lane, and passed the person who had accosted me. As well as I could see by the light of the lantern, he was a servant out of livery.

'Who's that?' whispered the clerk. 'Does he know anything about the keys?'

'We won't wait to ask him,' I replied. 'We will go on to the vestry first.'

The church was not visible, even by day-time, until the end of the lane was reached. As we mounted the rising ground which led to the building from that point, one of the village children—a boy—came close up to us attracted by the light we carried, and recognised the clerk.

'I say, measter,' said the boy, pulling officiously at the clerk's coat, 'there be summun up yander in the church. I heerd un lock the door on hisself—I heerd un strike a loight wi' a match.'

The clerk trembled, and leaned against me heavily.

'Come! come!' I said, encouragingly. 'We are not too late. We will catch the man, whoever he is. Keep the lantern, and follow me as fast as you can.'

I mounted the hill rapidly. The dark mass of the church-tower was the first object I discerned dimly against the night sky. As I turned aside to get round to the vestry, I heard heavy footsteps close to me. The servant had ascended to the church after us. 'I don't mean any harm,' he said, when I turned round on him; 'I'm only looking for my master.' The tones in which he spoke betrayed unmistakable fear. I took no notice of him, and went on.

The instant I turned the corner, and came in view of the vestry, I saw the lantern-skylight on the roof brilliantly lit up from within. It shone out with dazzling brightness against the murky, starless sky.

I hurried through the churchyard to the door.

As I got near there was a strange smell stealing out on the damp night air. I heard a snapping noise inside—I saw the light above grow brighter and brighter—a pane of the glass cracked—I ran to the door and put my hand on it. The vestry was on fire!

Before I could move, before I could draw my breath after that discovery, I was horror-struck by a heavy thump against the door, from the inside. I heard the key worked violently in the lock—I heard a man's voice, behind the door, raised to a dreadful shrillness, screaming for help.

The servant, who had followed me, staggered back shuddering, and dropped to his knees. 'Oh, my God! he said; 'it's Sir Percival!'

As the words passed his lips, the clerk joined us—and, at the same moment, there was another, and a last, grating turn of the key in the lock.

'The Lord have mercy on his soul!' said the old man. 'He is doomed and dead. He has hampered the lock.'

I rushed to the door. The one absorbing purpose that had filled all my thoughts, that had controlled all my actions, for weeks and weeks past, vanished in an instant from my mind. All remembrance of the heartless injury the man's crimes had inflicted; of the love, the innocence, the happiness he had pitilessly laid waste; of the oath I had sworn in my own heart to summon him to the terrible reckoning that he deserved—passed from my memory like a dream. I remembered nothing but the horror of his situation. I felt nothing

but the natural human impulse to save him from a frightful death.

'Try the other door!' I shouted. 'Try the door into the church! The lock's hampered. You're a dead man if you waste another moment on it!'

There had been no renewed cry for help, when the key was turned for the last time. There was no sound, now, of any kind, to give token that he was still alive. I heard nothing but the quickening crackle of the flames, and the sharp snap of the glass in the skylight above.

I looked round at my two companions. The servant had risen to his feet: he had taken the lantern, and was holding it up vacantly at the door. Terror seemed to have struck him with downright idiocy—he waited at my heels, he followed me about when I moved, like a dog. The clerk sat crouched up on one of the tombstones, shivering, and moaning to himself. The one moment in which I looked at them was enough to show me that they were both helpless.

Hardly knowing what I did, acting desperately on the first impulse that occurred to me, I seized the servant and pushed him against the vestry wall. 'Stoop!' I said, 'and hold by the stones. I am going to climb over you to the roof—I am going to break the skylight, and give him some air!'

The man trembled from head to foot, but he held firm. I got on his back, with my cudgel in my mouth; seized the parapet with both hands; and was instantly on the roof. In the frantic hurry and agitation of the moment, it never struck me that I might let out the flame instead of letting in the air. I struck at the skylight, and battered in the cracked, loosened glass at a blow. The fire leaped out like a wild beast from its lair.

If the wind had not chanced, in the position I occupied, to set it away from me, my exertions might have ended then and there. I crouched on the roof as the smoke poured out above me, with the flame. The gleams and flashes of the light showed me the servant's face staring up vacantly under the wall; the clerk risen to his feet on the tombstone, wringing his hands in despair; and the scanty population of the village, haggard men and terrified women, clustered beyond in the churchyard—all appearing and disappearing, in the red of the dreadful glare, in the black of the choking smoke. And the man beneath my feet!—the man, suffocating, burning, dying so near us all, so utterly beyond our reach!

The thought half maddened me. I lowered myself from the roof, by my hands, and dropped to the ground.

'The key of the church!' I shouted to the clerk. 'We must try it that way—we may save him yet if we can burst open the inner door.'

'No, no, no!' cried the old man. 'No hope! the church key and the vestry key are on the same ring—both inside there! Oh, sir, he's past saving—he's dust and ashes by this time!'

'They'll see the fire from the town,' said a voice from among the men behind me. 'There's a ingine in the town. They'll save the church.'

I called to that man—*he* had his wits about him—I called to him to come and speak to me. It would be a quarter of an hour at least before the town engine could reach us. The horror of remaining inactive, all that time, was more than I could face. In defence of my own reason, I persuaded myself that the doomed and lost wretch in the vestry might still be lying senseless on the floor, might not be dead yet. If we broke open the door, might we save him? I knew the strength

of the heavy lock—I knew the thickness of the nailed oak—I knew the hopelessness of assailing the one and the other by ordinary means. But surely there were beams still left in the dismantled cottages near the church? What if we got one, and used it as a battering-ram against the door?

The thought leapt through me, like the fire leaping out of the shattered skylight. I appealed to the man who had spoken first of the fire-engine in the town. 'Have you got your pickaxes handy?' Yes; they had. 'And a hatchet, and a saw, and a bit of rope?' Yes! yes! yes! I ran down among the villagers, with the lantern in my hand. 'Five shillings apiece to every man who helps me!' They started into life at the words. That ravenous second hunger of poverty—the hunger for money—roused them into tumult and activity in a moment. 'Two of you for more lanterns if you have them! Two of you for the pickaxes and the tools! The rest after me to find the beam!' They cheered—with shrill starveling voices they cheered. The women and the children fled back on either side. We rushed in a body down the churchyard path to the first empty cottage. Not a man was left behind but the clerk—the poor old clerk standing on the flat tombstone, sobbing and wailing over the church. The servant was still at my heels: his white, helpless, panic-stricken face was close over my shoulder as we pushed into the cottage. There were rafters from the torn-down floor above, lying loose on the ground—but they were too light. A beam ran across over our heads, but not out of reach of our arms and our pickaxes—a beam fast at each end in the ruined wall, with ceiling and flooring all ripped away, and a great gap in the roof above, open to the sky. We attacked the beam at both ends at once.

God! how it held—how the brick and mortar of the wall resisted us! We struck, and tugged, and tore. The beam gave at one end—it came down with a lump of brickwork after it. There was a scream from the women, all huddled in the doorway to look at us—a shout from the men—two of them down, but not hurt. Another tug all together—and the beam was loose at both ends. We raised it, and gave the word to clear the doorway. Now for the work! now for the rush at the door! There is the fire streaming into the sky, streaming brighter than ever to light us! Steady, along the churchyard path—steady with the beam, for a rush at the door. One, two, three—and off. Out rings the cheering again, irrepressibly. We have shaken it already; the hinges must give, if the lock won't. Another run with the beam! One, two, three—and off. It's loose! the stealthy fire darts at us through the crevice all round it. Another, and a last rush! The door falls in with a crash. A great hush of awe, a stillness of breathless expectation, possesses every living soul of us. We look for the body. The scorching heat on our faces drives us back: we see nothing—above, below, all through the room, we see nothing but a sheet of living fire.

'Where is he?' whispered the servant, staring vacantly at the flames.

'He's dust and ashes,' said the clerk. 'And the books are dust and ashes—and oh, sirs! the church will be dust and ashes soon.'

Those were the only two who spoke. When they were silent again, nothing stirred in the stillness but the bubble and the crackle of the flames.

Hark!

A harsh rattling sound in the distance—then, the hollow beat of horses' hoofs at full gallop—then, the low roar, the all-predominant tumult of hundreds of human voices clamouring and shouting together. The engine at last!

The people about me all turned from the fire, and ran eagerly to the brow of the hill. The old clerk tried to go with the rest; but his strength was exhausted. I saw him holding by one of the tombstones. 'Save the church!' he cried out, faintly, as if the firemen could hear him already. 'Save the church!'

The only man who never moved was the servant. There he stood, his eyes still fastened on the flames in a changeless, vacant stare. I spoke to him, I shook him by the arm. He was past rousing. He only whispered once more, 'Where is he?'

In ten minutes, the engine was in position; the well at the back of the church was feeding it; and the hose was carried to the doorway of the vestry. If help had been wanted from me, I could not have afforded it now. My energy of will was gone—my strength was exhausted—the turmoil of my thoughts was fearfully and suddenly stilled, now I knew that he was dead. I stood useless and helpless—looking, looking, looking into the burning room.

I saw the fire slowly conquered. The brightness of the glare faded—the steam rose in white clouds, and the smouldering heaps of embers showed red and black through it on the floor. There was a pause—then, an advance altogether of the firemen and the police, which blocked up the doorway—then a consultation in low voices—and then, two men were detached from the rest, and sent out of the churchyard through the crowd. The crowd drew back on either side, in dead silence, to let them pass.

After a while, a great shudder ran through the people; and the living lane widened slowly. The men came back along it, with a door from one of the empty houses. They carried it to the vestry, and went in. The police closed again round the doorway; and men stole out from among the crowd by twos and threes, and stood behind them, to be the first to see. Others waited near, to be the first to hear. Women and children were among these last.

The tidings from the vestry began to flow out among the crowd—they dropped slowly from mouth to mouth, till they reached the place where I was standing. I heard the questions and answers repeated again and again, in low, eager tones, all round me.

'Have they found him?' 'Yes.'—'Where?' 'Against the door; on his face.'—'Which door?' 'The door that goes into the church. His head was against it; he was down on his face.'—'Is his face burnt?' 'No.' 'Yes, it is.' 'No; scorched, not burnt; he lay on his face, I tell you.'—'Who was he? A lord, they say.' 'No, not a lord. *Sir* Something; Sir means Knight.' 'And Baronight, too.' 'No.' 'Yes it does.'—'What did he want in there?' 'No good, you may depend on it.'—'Did he do it on purpose?'—'Burn himself on purpose!'—'I don't mean himself; I mean the vestry.'—'Is he dreadful to look at?' 'Dreadful!'—'Not about the face, though?' 'No, no; not so much about the face.'—'Don't anybody know him?' 'There's a man says he does.'—'Who?' 'A servant, they say. But he's struck stupid-like, and the police don't believe him.'—'Don't anybody else know who it is?' 'Hush—!'

The loud, clear voice of a man in authority silenced the low hum of talking all round me, in an instant.

'Where is the gentleman who tried to save him?' said the voice.

'Here, sir—here he is!' Dozens of eager faces pressed about me—dozens of eager arms parted the crowd. The man in authority came up to me with a lantern in his hand.

'This way, sir, if you please,' he said, quietly.

I was unable to speak to him; I was unable to resist him, when he took my arm. I tried to say that I had never seen the dead man, in his lifetime—that there was no hope of identifying him by means of a stranger like me. But the words failed on my lips. I was faint and silent and helpless.

'Do you know him, sir?'

I was standing inside a circle of men. Three of them, opposite to me, were holding lanterns low down to the ground. Their eyes, and the eyes of all the rest, were fixed silently and expectantly on my face. I knew what was at my feet—I knew why they were holding the lanterns so low to the ground.

'Can you identify him, sir?'

My eyes dropped slowly. At first, I saw nothing under them but a coarse canvas cloth. The dripping of the rain on it was audible in the dreadful silence. I looked up, along the cloth; and there at the end, dark and grim and black, in the yellow light—there, was his dead face.

So, for the first and last time, I saw him. So the Visitation of God ruled it that he and I should meet.

XI.

The Inquest was hurried for certain local reasons which weighed with the coroner and the town authori-

ties. It was held on the afternoon of the next day. I was, necessarily, one among the witnesses summoned to assist the objects of the investigation.

My first proceeding, in the morning, was to go to the post-office, and inquire for the letter which I expected from Marian. No change of circumstances, however extraordinary, could affect the one great anxiety which weighed on my mind while I was away from London. The morning's letter, which was the only assurance I could receive that no misfortune had happened in my absence, was still the absorbing interest with which my day began.

To my relief, the letter from Marian was at the office waiting for me.

Nothing had happened—they were both as safe and as well as when I had left them. Laura sent her love, and begged that I would let her know of my return a day beforehand. Her sister added, in explanation of this message, that she had saved 'nearly a sovereign' out of her own private purse, and that she had claimed the privilege of ordering the dinner and giving the dinner which was to celebrate the day of my return. I read these little domestic confidences, in the bright morning, with the terrible recollection of what had happened the evening before, vivid in my memory. The necessity of sparing Laura any sudden knowledge of the truth was the first consideration which the letter suggested to me. I wrote at once to Marian, to tell her what I have told in these lines; presenting the tidings as gradually and gently as I could, and warning her not to let any such thing as a newspaper fall in Laura's way while I was absent. In the case of any other woman, less courageous and less reliable, I might have hesitated before I ventured on unreservedly disclosing

the whole truth. But I owed it to Marian to be faithful to my past experience of her, and to trust her as I trusted myself.

My letter was necessarily a long one. It occupied me until the time came for proceeding to the Inquest.

The objects of the legal inquiry were necessarily beset by peculiar complications and difficulties. Besides the investigation into the manner in which the deceased had met his death, there were serious questions to be settled relating to the cause of the fire, to the abstraction of the keys, and to the presence of a stranger in the vestry at the time when the flames broke out. Even the identification of the dead man had not yet been accomplished. The helpless condition of the servant had made the police distrustful of his asserted recognition of his master. They had sent to Knowlesbury overnight to secure the attendance of witnesses who were well acquainted with the personal appearance of Sir Percival Glyde, and they had communicated, the first thing in the morning, with Blackwater Park. These precautions enabled the coroner and jury to settle the question of identity, and to confirm the correctness of the servant's assertion; the evidence offered by competent witnesses, and by the discovery of certain facts, being subsequently strengthened by an examination of the dead man's watch. The crest and the name of Sir Percival Glyde were engraved inside it.

The next inquiries related to the fire.

The servant and I, and the boy who had heard the light struck in the vestry, were the first witnesses called. The boy gave his evidence clearly enough; but the servant's mind had not yet recovered the shock inflicted on it—he was plainly incapable of assisting the objects of the inquiry, and he was desired to stand down.

To my own relief, my examination was not a long one. I had not known the deceased; I had never seen him; I was not aware of his presence at Old Welmingham; and I had not been in the vestry at the finding of the body. All I could prove was that I had stopped at the clerk's cottage to ask my way; that I had heard from him of the loss of the keys; that I had accompanied him to the church to render what help I could; that I had seen the fire; that I had heard some person unknown, inside the vestry, trying vainly to unlock the door; and that I had done what I could, from motives of humanity, to save the man. Other witnesses, who had been acquainted with the deceased, were asked if they could explain the mystery of his presumed abstraction of the keys, and his presence in the burning room. But the coroner seemed to take it for granted, naturally enough, that I, as a total stranger in the neighbourhood, and a total stranger to Sir Percival Glyde, could not be in a position to offer any evidence on these two points.

The course that I was myself bound to take, when my formal examination had closed, seemed clear to me. I did not feel called on to volunteer any statement of my own private convictions; in the first place, because my doing so could serve no practical purpose, now that all proof in support of any surmises of mine was burnt with the burnt register; in the second place, because I could not have intelligibly stated my opinion—my unsupported opinion—without disclosing the whole story of the conspiracy, and producing, beyond a doubt, the same unsatisfactory effect on the mind of the coroner and the jury which I had already produced on the mind of Mr. Kyrle.

In these pages, however, and after the time that has

now elapsed, no such cautions and restraints as are here described, need fetter the free expression of my opinion. I will state briefly, before my pen occupies itself with other events, how my own convictions lead me to account for the abstraction of the keys, for the outbreak of the fire, and for the death of the man.

The news of my being free on bail drove Sir Percival, as I believe, to his last resources. The attempted attack on the road was one of those resources; and the suppression of all practical proof of his crime, by destroying the page of the register on which the forgery had been committed, was the other, and the surest of the two. If I could produce no extract from the original book, to compare with the certified copy at Knowlesbury, I could produce no positive evidence, and could threaten him with no fatal exposure. All that was necessary to the attainment of his end was, that he should get into the vestry unperceived, that he should tear out the page in the register, and that he should leave the vestry again as privately as he had entered it.

On this supposition, it is easy to understand why he waited until nightfall before he made the attempt, and why he took advantage of the clerk's absence to possess himself of the keys. Necessity would oblige him to strike a light to find his way to the right register; and common caution would suggest his locking the door on the inside in case of intrusion on the part of any inquisitive stranger, or on my part, if I happened to be in the neighbourhood at the time.

I cannot believe that it was any part of his intention to make the destruction of the register appear to be the result of accident, by purposely setting the vestry on fire. The bare chance that prompt assistance might arrive, and that the book's might, by the remotest possibility,

be saved, would have been enough, on a moment's consideration, to dismiss any idea of this sort from his mind. Remembering the quantity of combustible objects in the vestry—the straw, the papers, the packing-cases, the dry wood, the old worm-eaten presses—all the probabilities, in my estimation, point to the fire as the result of an accident with his matches or his light.

His first impulse, under these circumstances, was doubtless to try to extinguish the flames—and, failing in that, his second impulse (ignorant as he was of the state of the lock) had been to attempt to escape by the door which had given him entrance. When I had called to him, the flames must have reached across the door leading into the church, on either side of which the presses extended, and close to which the other combustible objects were placed. In all probability, the smoke and flame (confined as they were to the room) had been too much for him, when he tried to escape by the inner door. He must have dropped in his death-swoon—he must have sunk in the place where he was found—just as I got on the roof to break the skylight-window. Even if we had been able, afterwards, to get into the church, and to burst open the door from that side, the delay must have been fatal. He would have been past saving, long past saving, by that time. We should only have given the flames free ingress into the church: the church, which was now preserved, but which, in that event, would have shared the fate of the vestry. There is no doubt in my mind—there can be no doubt in the mind of any one—that he was a dead man before ever we got to the empty cottage, and worked with might and main to tear down the beam.

This is the nearest approach that any theory of mine

can make towards accounting for a result which was visible matter of fact. As I have described them, so events passed to us outside. As I have related it, so his body was found.

The Inquest was adjourned over one day; no explanation that the eye of the law could recognise having been discovered, thus far, to account for the mysterious circumstances of the case.

It was arranged that more witnesses should be summoned, and that the London solicitor of the deceased should be invited to attend. A medical man was also charged with the duty of reporting on the mental condition of the servant, which appeared at present to debar him from giving any evidence of the least importance. He could only declare, in a dazed way, that he had been ordered, on the night of the fire, to wait in the lane, and that he knew nothing else, except that the deceased was certainly his master.

My own impression was, that he had been first used (without any guilty knowledge on his own part) to ascertain the fact of the clerk's absence from home on the previous day; and that he had been afterwards ordered to wait near the church (but out of sight of the vestry) to assist his master, in the event of my escaping the attack on the road, and of a collision occurring between Sir Percival and myself. It is necessary to add, that the man's own testimony was never obtained to confirm this view. The medical report of him declared that what little mental faculty he possessed was seriously shaken; nothing satisfactory was extracted from him at the adjourned Inquest; and, for aught I know to the contrary, he may never have recovered to this day.

I returned to the hotel at Welmingham, so jaded in body and mind, so weakened and depressed by all that I had gone through, as to be quite unfit to endure the local gossip about the Inquest, and to answer the trivial questions that the talkers addressed to me in the coffee-room. I withdrew from my scanty dinner to my cheap garret-chamber, to secure myself a little quiet, and to think, undisturbed, of Laura and Marian.

If I had been a richer man, I would have gone back to London, and would have comforted myself with a sight of the two dear faces again, that night. But, I was bound to appear, if called on, at the adjourned Inquest, and doubly bound to answer my bail before the magistrate at Knowlesbury. Our slender resources had suffered already; and the doubtful future—more doubtful than ever now—made me dread decreasing our means unnecessarily, by allowing myself an indulgence, even at the small cost of a double railway journey, in the carriages of the second class.

The next day—the day immediately following the Inquest—was left at my own disposal. I began the morning by again applying at the post-office for my regular report from Marian. It was waiting for me, as before, and it was written, throughout, in good spirits. I read the letter thankfully; and then set forth, with my mind at ease for the day, to go to Old Welmingham, and to view the scene of the fire by the morning light.

What changes met me when I got there!

Through all the ways of our unintelligible world, the trivial and the terrible walk hand in hand together. The irony of circumstances holds no mortal catastrophe in respect. When I reached the church, the trampled condition of the burial-ground was the only serious trace left to tell of the fire and the death. A rough

hoarding of boards had been knocked up before the vestry doorway. Rude caricatures were scrawled on it already; and the village children were fighting and shouting for the possession of the best peep-hole to see through. On the spot where I had heard the cry for help from the burning room, on the spot where the panic-stricken servant had dropped on his knees, a fussy flock of poultry was now scrambling for the first choice of worms after the rain—and on the ground at my feet, where the door and its dreadful burden had been laid, a workman's dinner was waiting for him, tied up in a yellow basin, and his faithful cur in charge was yelping at me for coming near the food. The old clerk, looking idly at the slow commencement of the repairs, had only one interest that he could talk about, now—the interest of escaping all blame, for his own part, on account of the accident that had happened. One of the village women, whose white wild face I remembered, the picture of terror, when we pulled down the beam, was giggling with another woman, the picture of inanity, over an old washing-tub. There is nothing serious in mortality! Solomon in all his glory, was Solomon with the elements of the contemptible lurking in every fold of his robes and in every corner of his palace.

As I left the place, my thoughts turned, not for the first time, to the complete overthrow that all present hope of establishing Laura's identity had now suffered, through Sir Percival's death. He was gone—and, with him, the chance was gone which had been the one object of all my labours and all my hopes.

Could I look at my failure from no truer point of view than this?

Suppose he had lived—would that change of circumstance have altered the result? Could I have made my

discovery a marketable commodity, even for Laura's sake, after I had found out that robbery of the rights of others was the essence of Sir Percival's crime? Could I have offered the price of *my* silence for *his* confession of the conspiracy, when the effect of that silence must have been to keep the right heir from the estates, and the right owner from the name? Impossible! If Sir Percival had lived, the discovery, from which (in my ignorance of the true nature of the Secret) I had hoped so much, could not have been mine to suppress, or to make public, as I thought best, for the vindication of Laura's rights. In common honesty and common honour I must have gone at once to the stranger whose birthright had been usurped—I must have renounced the victory at the moment when it was mine, by placing my discovery unreservedly in that stranger's hands—and I must have faced afresh all the difficulties which stood between me and the one object of my life, exactly as I was resolved, in my heart of hearts, to face them now!

I returned to Welmingham with my mind composed; feeling more sure of myself and my resolution than I had felt yet.

On my way to the hotel, I passed the end of the square in which Mrs. Catherick lived. Should I go back to the house, and make another attempt to see her? No. That news of Sir Percival's death, which was the last news she ever expected to hear, must have reached her, hours since. All the proceedings at the Inquest had been reported in the local paper that morning: there was nothing I could tell her which she did not know already. My interest in making her speak had slackened. I remembered the furtive hatred in her face, when she said, 'There is no news of Sir Percival that I

don't expect—except the news of his death.' I remembered the stealthy interest in her eyes when they settled on me at parting, after she had spoken those words. Some instinct, deep in my heart, which I felt to be a true one, made the prospect of again entering her presence repulsive to me—I turned away from the square, and went straight back to the hotel.

Some hours later, while I was resting in the coffee-room, a letter was placed in my hands by the waiter. It was addressed to me, by name; and I found on inquiry, that it had been left at the bar by a woman, just as it was near dusk, and just before the gas was lighted. She had said nothing; and she had gone away again before there was time to speak to her, or even to notice who she was.

I opened the letter. It was neither dated, nor signed; and the handwriting was palpably disguised. Before I had read the first sentence, however, I knew who my correspondent was. Mrs. Catherick.

The letter ran as follows—I copy it exactly, word for word:

The Story continued by MRS. CATHERICK.

SIR,

You have not come back, as you said you would. No matter; I know the news, and I write to tell you so. Did you see anything particular in my face when you left me? I was wondering, in my own mind, whether the day of his downfall had come at last, and whether you were the chosen instrument for working it. You were—and you *have* worked it.

You were weak enough, as I have heard, to try and save his life. If you had succeeded, I should have

looked upon you as my enemy. Now you have failed, I hold you as my friend. Your inquiries frightened him into the vestry by night; your inquiries, without your privity and against your will, have served the hatred and wreaked the vengeance of three-and-twenty years. Thank you, sir, in spite of yourself.

I owe something to the man who has done this. How can I pay my debt? If I was a young woman still, I might say, 'Come! put your arm round my waist, and kiss me, if you like.' I should have been fond enough of you, even to go that length; and you would have accepted my invitation—you would, sir, twenty years ago! But I am an old woman, now. Well! I can satisfy your curiosity, and pay my debt in that way. You *had* a great curiosity to know certain private affairs of mine, when you came to see me—private affairs which all your sharpness could not look into without my help—private affairs which you have not discovered, even now. You *shall* discover them; your curiosity shall be satisfied. I will take any trouble to please you, my estimable young friend!

You were a little boy, I suppose, in the year twenty-seven? I was a handsome young woman, at that time, living at Old Welmingham. I had a contemptible fool for a husband. I had also the honour of being acquainted (never mind how) with a certain gentleman (never mind whom). I shall not call him by his name. Why should I? It was not his own. He never had a name: you know that, by this time, as well as I do.

It will be more to the purpose to tell you how he worked himself into my good graces. I was born with the tastes of a lady; and he gratified them. In other words, he admired me, and he made me presents. No woman can resist admiration and presents—especially

presents, provided they happen to be just the things she wants. He was sharp enough to know that—most men are. Naturally, he wanted something in return—all men do. And what do you think was the something? The merest trifle. Nothing but the key of the vestry, and the key of the press inside it, when my husband's back was turned. Of course he lied when I asked him why he wished me to get him the keys, in that private way. He might have saved himself the trouble—I didn't believe him. But I liked my presents, and I wanted more. So I got him the keys, without my husband's knowledge; and I watched him, without his own knowledge. Once, twice, four times, I watched him—and the fourth time I found him out.

I was never over-scrupulous where other people's affairs were concerned; and I was not over-scrupulous about his adding one to the marriages in the register, on his own account.

Of course, I knew it was wrong; but it did no harm to *me*—which was one good reason for not making a fuss about it. And I had not got a gold watch and chain—which was another, still better. And he had promised me one from London, only the day before—which was a third, best of all. If I had known what the law considered the crime to be, and how the law punished it, I should have taken proper care of myself, and have exposed him then and there. But I knew nothing—and I longed for the gold watch. All the conditions I insisted on were that he should take me into his confidence and tell me everything. I was as curious about his affairs then, as you are about mine now. He granted my conditions—why, you will see presently.

This, put in short, is what I heard from him. He

did not willingly tell me all that I tell you here. I drew some of it from him by persuasion and some of it by questions. I was determined to have all the truth—and I believe I got it.

He knew no more than any one else of what the state of things really was between his father and mother, till after his mother's death. Then, his father confessed it, and promised to do what he could for his son. He died having done nothing—not having even made a will. The son (who can blame him?) wisely provided for himself. He came to England at once, and took possession of the property. There was no one to suspect him, and no one to say him nay. His father and mother had always lived as man and wife—none of the few people who were acquainted with them ever supposed them to be anything else. The right person to claim the property (if the truth had been known) was a distant relation, who had no idea of ever getting it, and who was away at sea when his father died. He had no difficulty, so far—he took possession, as a matter of course. But he could not borrow money on the property as a matter of course. There were two things wanted of him, before he could do this. One was a certificate of his birth, and the other was a certificate of his parents' marriage. The certificate of his birth was easily got—he was born abroad, and the certificate was there in due form. The other matter was a difficulty —and that difficulty brought him to Old Welmingham.

But for one consideration, he might have gone to Knowlesbury instead.

His mother had been living there just before she met with his father—living under her maiden name; the truth being that she was really a married woman; married in Ireland, where her husband had ill-used her

and had afterwards gone off with some other person. I give you this fact on good authority; Sir Felix mentioned it to his son, as the reason why he had not married. You may wonder why the son, knowing that his parents had met each other at Knowlesbury, did not play his first tricks with the register of that church, where it might have been fairly presumed his father and mother were married. The reason was, that the clergyman who did duty at Knowlesbury church, in the year eighteen hundred and three (when, according to his birth-certificate, his father and mother *ought* to have been married), was alive still, when he took possession of the property in the New Year of eighteen hundred and twenty-seven. This awkward circumstance forced him to extend his inquiries to our neighbourhood. There, no such danger existed: the former clergyman at our church having been dead for some years.

Old Welmingham suited his purpose as well as Knowlesbury. His father had removed his mother from Knowlesbury, and had lived with her at a cottage on the river, a little distance from our village. People who had known his solitary ways when he was single, did not wonder at his solitary ways when he was supposed to be married. If he had not been a hideous creature to look at, his retired life with the lady might have raised suspicions: but, as things were, his hiding his ugliness and his deformity in the strictest privacy surprised nobody. He lived in our neighbourhood till he came in possession of the Park. After three or four and twenty years had passed, who was to say (the clergyman being dead) that his marriage had not been as private as the rest of his life, and that it had not taken place at Old Welmingham church?

So, as I told you, the son found our neighbourhood the surest place he could choose, to set things right secretly in his own interests. It may surprise you to hear that what he really did to the marriage-register was done on the spur of the moment—done on second thoughts.

His first notion was only to tear the leaf out (in the right year and month), to destroy it privately, to go back to London, and to tell the lawyers to get him the necessary certificate of his father's marriage, innocently referring them of course to the date on the leaf that was gone. Nobody could say his father and mother had *not* been married after that—and whether, under the circumstances, they would stretch a point or not about lending him the money (he thought they would), he had his answer ready at all events, if a question was ever raised about his right to the name and the estate.

But when he came to look privately at the register for himself, he found at the bottom of one of the pages for the year eighteen hundred and three, a blank space left, seemingly through there being no room to make a long entry there, which was made instead at the top of the next page. The sight of this chance altered all his plans. It was an opportunity he had never hoped for, or thought of—and he took it, you know how. The blank space, to have exactly tallied with his birth-certificate, ought to have occurred in the July part of the register. It occurred in the September part instead. However, in this case, if suspicious questions were asked, the answer was not hard to find. He had only to describe himself as a seven months' child.

I was fool enough, when he told me his story, to feel some interest and some pity for him—which was just what he calculated on, as you will see. I thought him

hardly used. It was not his fault that his father and mother were not married; and it was not his father's and mother's fault either. A more scrupulous woman than I was—a woman who had not set her heart on a gold watch and chain—would have found some excuses for him. At all events, I held my tongue, and helped to screen what he was about.

He was some time getting the ink the right colour (mixing it over and over again in pots and bottles of mine), and some time, afterwards, in practising the handwriting. But he succeeded in the end—and made an honest woman of his mother, after she was dead in her grave! So far, I don't deny that he behaved honourable enough to myself. He gave me my watch and chain, and spared no expense in buying them; both were of superior workmanship, and very expensive. I have got them still—the watch goes beautifully.

You said, the other day, that Mrs. Clements had told you everything she knew. In that case, there is no need for me to write about the trumpery scandal by which I was the sufferer—the innocent sufferer, I positively assert. You must know as well as I do what the notion was which my husband took into his head, when he found me and my fine-gentleman acquaintance meeting each other privately, and talking secrets together. But what you don't know, is how it ended between that same gentleman and myself. You shall read, and see how he behaved to me.

The first words I said to him, when I saw the turn things had taken, were, 'Do me justice—clear my character of a stain on it which you know I don't deserve. I don't want you to make a clean breast of it to my husband—only tell him, on your word of honour as a gentleman, that he is wrong, and that I am not

to blame in the way he thinks I am. Do me that justice, at least, after all I have done for you.' He flatly refused, in so many words. He told me, plainly, that it was his interest to let my husband and all my neighbours believe the falsehood—because, as long as they did so, they were quite certain never to suspect the truth. I had a spirit of my own; and I told him they should know the truth from my lips. His reply was short, and to the point. If I spoke, I was a lost woman, as certainly as he was a lost man.

Yes! it had come to that. He had deceived me about the risk I ran in helping him. He had practised on my ignorance; he had tempted me with his gifts; he had interested me with his story—and the result of it was that he made me his accomplice. He owned this coolly; and he ended by telling me, for the first time, what the frightful punishment really was for his offence, and for any one who helped him to commit it. In those days, the law was not so tender-hearted as I hear it is now. Murderers were not the only people liable to be hanged; and women convicts were not treated like ladies in undeserved distress. I confess he frightened me—the mean impostor! the cowardly blackguard! Do you understand, now, how I hated him? Do you understand why I am taking all this trouble—thankfully taking it—to gratify the curiosity of the meritorious young gentleman who hunted him down?

Well, to go on. He was hardly fool enough to drive me to downright desperation. I was not the sort of woman whom it was quite safe to hunt into a corner—he knew that, and wisely quieted me with proposals for the future.

I deserved some reward (he was kind enough to say) for the service I had done him, and some compensation

(he was so obliging as to add) for what I had suffered. He was quite willing—generous scoundrel!—to make me a handsome yearly allowance, payable quarterly, on two conditions. First, I was to hold my tongue—in my own interests as well as in his. Secondly, I was not to stir away from Welmingham, without first letting him know, and waiting till I had obtained his permission. In my own neighbourhood, no virtuous female friends would tempt me into dangerous gossiping at the tea-table. In my own neighbourhood, he would always know where to find me. A hard condition, that second one—but I accepted it.

What else was I to do? I was left helpless, with the prospect of a coming incumbrance in the shape of a child. What else was I to do? Cast myself on the mercy of my runaway idiot of a husband who had raised the scandal against me? I would have died first. Besides, the allowance *was* a handsome one. I had a better income, a better house over my head, better carpets on my floors, than half the women who turned up the whites of their eyes at the sight of me. The dress of Virtue, in our parts, was cotton print. I had silk.

So, I accepted the conditions he offered me, and made the best of them, and fought my battle with my respectable neighbours on their own ground, and won it in course of time—as you saw yourself. How I kept his Secret (and mine) through all the years that have passed from that time to this; and whether my late daughter, Anne, ever really crept into my confidence, and got the keeping of the Secret too—are questions, I dare say, to which you are curious to find an answer. Well! my gratitude refuses you nothing. I will turn to a fresh page, and give you the answer, immediately.

But you must excuse one thing—you must excuse my beginning, Mr. Hartright, with an expression of surprise at the interest which you appear to have felt in my late daughter. It is quite unaccountable to me. If that interest makes you anxious for any particulars of her early life, I must refer you to Mrs. Clements, who knows more of the subject than I do. Pray understand that I do not profess to have been at all over-fond of my late daughter.

She was a worry to me from first to last, with the additional disadvantage of being always weak in the head. You like candour, and I hope this satisfies you.

There is no need to trouble you with many personal particulars relating to those past times. It will be enough to say that I observed the terms of the bargain on my side, and that I enjoyed my comfortable income, in return, paid quarterly.

Now and then I got away, and changed the scene for a short time; always asking leave of my lord and master first, and generally getting it. He was not, as I have already told you, fool enough to drive me too hard; and he could reasonably rely on my holding my tongue, for my own sake, if not for his. One of my longest trips away from home was the trip I took to Limmeridge, to nurse a half-sister there, who was dying. She was reported to have saved money; and I thought it as well (in case any accident happened to stop my allowance) to look after my own interests in that direction. As things turned out, however, my pains were all thrown away; and I got nothing, because nothing was to be had.

I had taken Anne to the north with me; having my whims and fancies, occasionally, about my child, and getting, at such times, jealous of Mrs. Clements's influence over her. I never liked Mrs. Clements. She

was a poor empty-headed spiritless woman—what you call a born drudge—and I was, now and then, not averse to plaguing her by taking Anne away. Not knowing what else to do with my girl, while I was nursing in Cumberland, I put her to school at Limmeridge. The lady of the manor, Mrs. Fairlie (a remarkably plain-looking woman, who had entrapped one of the handsomest men in England into marrying her), amused me wonderfully, by taking a violent fancy to my girl. The consequence was, she learnt nothing at school, and was petted and spoilt at Limmeridge House. Among other whims and fancies which they taught her there, they put some nonsense into her head about always wearing white. Hating white and liking colours myself, I determined to take the nonsense out of her head as soon as we got home again.

Strange to say, my daughter resolutely resisted me. When she *had* got a notion once fixed in her mind she was, like other half-witted people, as obstinate as a mule in keeping it. We quarrelled finely; and Mrs. Clements, not liking to see it I suppose, offered to take Anne away to live in London with her. I should have said Yes, if Mrs. Clements had not sided with my daughter about her dressing herself in white. But, being determined she should *not* dress herself in white, and disliking Mrs. Clements more than ever for taking part against me, I said No, and meant No, and stuck to No. The consequence was, my daughter remained with me; and the consequence of that, in its turn, was the first serious quarrel that happened about the Secret.

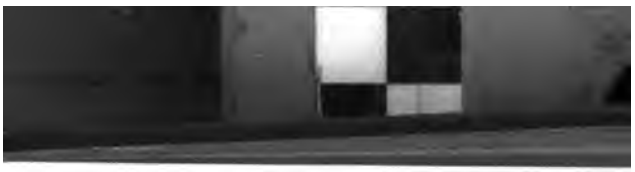
The circumstance took place long after the time I have just been writing of. I had been settled for years in the new town; and was steadily living down my bad character, and slowly gaining ground among the respect-

able inhabitants. It helped me forward greatly towards this object, to have my daughter with me. Her harmlessness, and her fancy for dressing in white, excited a certain amount of sympathy. I left off opposing her favourite whim, on that account, because some of the sympathy was sure, in course of time, to fall to my share. Some of it did fall. I date my getting a choice of the two best sittings to let in the church, from that time; and I date the clergyman's first bow from my getting the sittings.

Well, being settled in this way, I received a letter one morning from that highly born gentleman (now deceased), in answer to one of mine, warning him, according to agreement, of my wishing to leave the town, for a little change of air and scene.

The ruffianly side of him must have been uppermost, I suppose, when he got my letter—for he wrote back, refusing me in such abominable insolent language, that I lost all command over myself; and abused him, in my daughter's presence, as, 'a low impostor whom I could ruin for life, if I chose to open my lips and let out his secret.' I said no more about him than that; being brought to my senses, as soon as those words had escaped me, by the sight of my daughter's face, looking eagerly and curiously at mine. I instantly ordered her out of the room, until I had composed myself again.

My sensations were not pleasant, I can tell you, when I came to reflect on my own folly. Anne had been more than usually crazy and queer, that year; and when I thought of the chance there might be of her repeating my words in the town, and mentioning *his* name in connexion with them, if inquisitive people got hold of her, I was finely terrified at the possible consequences. My worst fears for myself, my worst dread



of what he might do, led me no farther than this. I was quite unprepared for what really did happen, only the next day.

On that next day, without any warning to me to expect him, he came to the house.

His first words, and the tone in which he spoke them, surly as it was, showed me plainly enough that he had repented already of his insolent answer to my application, and that he had come, in a mighty bad temper, to try and set matters right again, before it was too late. Seeing my daughter in the room with me (I had been afraid to let her out of my sight, after what had happened the day before), he ordered her away. They neither of them liked each other; and he vented the ill-temper on *her*, which he was afraid to show to *me*.

'Leave us,' he said, looking at her over his shoulder. She looked back over *her* shoulder, and waited, as if she didn't care to go. 'Do you hear?' he roared out; 'leave the room.' 'Speak to me civilly,' says she, getting red in the face. 'Turn the idiot out,' says he, looking my way. She had always had crazy notions of her own about her dignity; and that word 'idiot' upset her in a moment. Before I could interfere, she stepped up to him, in a fine passion. 'Beg my pardon, directly,' says she, 'or I'll make it the worse for you. I'll let out your Secret. I can ruin you for life, if I choose to open my lips.' My own words!—repeated exactly from what I had said the day before—repeated, in his presence, as if they had come from herself. He sat speechless, as white as the paper I am writing on, while I pushed her out of the room. When he recovered himself——

No! I am too respectable a woman to mention what he said when he recovered himself. My pen is the pen

of a member of the rector's congregation, and a subscriber to the 'Wednesday Lectures on Justification by Faith'—how can you expect me to employ it in writing bad language? Suppose, for yourself, the raging, swearing frenzy of the lowest ruffian in England; and let us get on together, as fast as may be, to the way in which it all ended.

It ended, as you probably guess, by this time, in his insisting on securing his own safety by shutting her up.

I tried to set things right. I told him that she had merely repeated, like a parrot, the words she had heard me say, and that she knew no particulars whatever, because I had mentioned none. I explained that she had affected, out of crazy spite against him, to know what she really did *not* know; that she only wanted to threaten him and aggravate him, for speaking to her as he had just spoken; and that my unlucky words gave her just the chance of doing mischief of which she was in search. I referred him to other queer ways of hers, and to his own experience of the vagaries of half-witted people—it was all to no purpose—he would not believe me on my oath—he was absolutely certain I had betrayed the whole Secret. In short, he would hear of nothing but shutting her up.

Under these circumstances, I did my duty as a mother. 'No Pauper Asylum,' I said; 'I won't have her put in a pauper Asylum. A Private Establishment, if *you* please. I have my feelings as a mother, and my character to preserve in the town; and I will submit to nothing but a Private Establishment, of the sort which my genteel neighbours would choose for afflicted relatives of their own.' Those were my words. It is gratifying to me to reflect that I did my duty. Though never over-fond of my late daughter, I had a proper

pride about her. No pauper stain—thanks to my firmness and resolution—ever rested on MY child.

Having carried my point (which I did the more easily, in consequence of the facilities offered by private Asylums), I could not refuse to admit that there were certain advantages gained by shutting her up. In the first place, she was taken excellent care of—being treated (as I took care to mention in the town) on the footing of a Lady. In the second place, she was kept away from Welmingham, where she might have set people suspecting and inquiring, by repeating my own incautious words.

The only drawback of putting her under restraint was a very slight one. We merely turned her empty boast about knowing the Secret, into a fixed delusion. Having first spoken in sheer crazy spitefulness against the man who had offended her, she was cunning enough to see that she had seriously frightened him, and sharp enough afterwards to discover that *he* was concerned in shutting her up. The consequence was she flamed out into a perfect frenzy of passion against him, going to the Asylum; and the first words she said to the nurses, after they had quieted her, were, that she was put in confinement for knowing his secret, and that she meant to open her lips and ruin him, when the right time came.

She may have said the same thing to you, when you thoughtlessly assisted her escape. She certainly said it (as I heard last summer) to the unfortunate woman who married our sweet-tempered, nameless gentleman, lately deceased. If either you, or that unlucky lady, had questioned my daughter closely, and had insisted on her explaining what she really meant, you would have found her lose all her self-importance suddenly, and get vacant, and restless, and confused—you would

have discovered that I am writing nothing here but the plain truth. She knew that there was a Secret—she knew who was connected with it—she knew who would suffer by its being known—and, beyond that, whatever airs of importance she may have given herself, whatever crazy boasting she may have indulged in with strangers, she never to her dying day knew more.

Have I satisfied your curiosity? I have taken pains enough to satisfy it at any rate. There is really nothing else I have to tell you about myself, or my daughter. My worst responsibilities, so far as she was concerned, were all over when she was secured in the Asylum. I had a form of letter relating to the circumstances under which she was shut up, given me to write, in answer to one Miss Halcombe, who was curious in the matter, and who must have heard plenty of lies about me from a certain tongue well accustomed to the telling of the same. And I did what I could afterwards to trace my runaway daughter, and prevent her from doing mischief, by making inquiries, myself, in the neighbourhood where she was falsely reported to have been seen. But these and other trifles like them, are of little or no interest to you after what you have heard already.

So far, I have written in the friendliest possible spirit. But I cannot close this letter without adding a word here of serious remonstrance and reproof, addressed to yourself.

In the course of your personal interview with me, you audaciously referred to my late daughter's parentage, on the father's side, as if that parentage was a matter of doubt. This was highly improper and very ungentlemanlike on your part! If we see each other again, remember, if you please, that I will allow no liberties to be taken with my reputation, and that the moral

atmosphere of Welmingham (to use a favourite expression of my friend the rector's) must not be tainted by loose conversation of any kind. If you allow yourself to doubt that my husband was Anne's father, you personally insult me in the grossest manner. If you have felt, and if you still continue to feel, an unhallowed curiosity on this subject, I recommend you, in your own interests, to check it at once and for ever. On this side of the grave, Mr. Hartright, whatever may happen on the other, *that* curiosity will never be gratified.

Perhaps, after what I had just said, you will see the necessity of writing me an apology. Do so; and I will willingly receive it. I will, afterwards, if your wishes point to a second interview with me, go a step farther, and receive *you*. My circumstances only enable me to invite you to tea—not that they are at all altered for the worse by what has happened. I have always lived, as I think I told you, well within my income; and I have saved enough, in the last twenty years, to make me quite comfortable for the rest of my life. It is not my intention to leave Welmingham. There are one or two little advantages which I have still to gain in the town. The clergyman bows to me—as you saw. He is married; and his wife is not quite so civil. I propose to join the Dorcas Society; and I mean to make the clergyman's wife bow to me next.

If you favour me with your company, pray understand that the conversation must be entirely on general subjects. Any attempted reference to this letter will be quite useless—I am determined not to acknowledge having written it. The evidence has been destroyed in the fire, I know; but I think it desirable to err on the side of caution, nevertheless.

On this account, no names are mentioned here, nor is

any signature attached to these lines: the handwriting is disguised throughout, and I mean to deliver the letter myself, under circumstances which will prevent all fear of its being traced to my house. You can have no possible cause to complain of these precautions; seeing that they do not affect the information I here communicate, in consideration of the special indulgence which you have deserved at my hands. My hour for tea is half-past five, and my buttered toast waits for nobody.

The Story continued by WALTER HARTRIGHT.

I.

My first impulse, after reading Mrs. Catherick's extraordinary narrative, was to destroy it. The hardened, shameless depravity of the whole composition, from beginning to end—the atrocious perversity of mind which persistently associated me with a calamity for which I was in no sense answerable, and with a death which I had risked my life in trying to avert—so disgusted me, that I was on the point of tearing the letter, when a consideration suggested itself, which warned me to wait a little before I destroyed it.

This consideration was entirely unconnected with Sir Percival. The information communicated to me, so far as it concerned him, did little more than confirm the conclusions at which I had already arrived.

He had committed his offence as I had supposed him to have committed it; and the absence of all reference, on Mrs. Catherick's part, to the duplicate register at Knowlesbury, strengthened my previous conviction that the existence of the book, and the risk of detection which

it implied, must have been necessarily unknown to Sir Percival. My interest in the question of the forgery was now at an end; and my only object in keeping the letter was to make it of some future service, in clearing up the last mystery that still remained to baffle me—the parentage of Anne Catherick, on the father's side. There were one or two sentences dropped in her mother's narrative, which it might be useful to refer to again, when matters of more immediate importance allowed me leisure to search for the missing evidence. I did not despair of still finding that evidence; and I had lost none of my anxiety to discover it, for I had lost none of my interest in tracing the father of the poor creature who now lay at rest in Mrs. Fairlie's grave.

Accordingly, I sealed up the letter, and put it away carefully in my pocket-book to be referred to again when the time came.

The next day was my last in Hampshire. When I had appeared again before the magistrate at Knowlesbury, and when I had attended at the adjourned Inquest, I should be free to return to London by the afternoon or the evening train.

My first errand in the morning was, as usual, to the post-office. The letter from Marian was there, but I thought, when it was handed to me, that it felt unusually light. I anxiously opened the envelope. There was nothing inside but a small strip of paper, folded in two. The few blotted, hurriedly-written lines which were traced on it contained these words:

'Come back as soon as you can. I have been obliged to move. Come to Gower's Walk, Fulham (number five). I will be on the look-out for you. Don't be alarmed about us; we are both safe and well. But come back.—Marian.'

The news which those lines contained—news which I instantly associated with some attempted treachery on the part of Count Fosco—fairly overwhelmed me. I stood breathless, with the paper crumpled up in my hand. What had happened? What subtle wickedness had the Count planned and executed in my absence? A night had passed since Marian's note was written—hours must elapse still, before I could get back to them—some new disaster might have happened already, of which I was ignorant. And here, miles and miles away from them, here I must remain—held doubly held, at the disposal of the law!

I hardly know to what forgetfulness of my obligations anxiety and alarm might not have tempted me, but for the quieting influence of my faith in Marian. My absolute reliance on her was the one earthly consideration which helped me to restrain myself, and gave me courage to wait. The Inquest was the first of the impediments in the way of my freedom of action. I attended it at the appointed time; the legal formalities requiring my presence in the room, but, as it turned out; not calling on me to repeat my evidence. This useless delay was a hard trial, although I did my best to quiet my impatience by following the course of the proceedings as closely as I could.

The London solicitor of the deceased (Mr. Merriman) was among the persons present. But he was quite unable to assist the objects of the inquiry. He could only say that he was inexpressibly shocked and astonished, and that he could throw no light whatever on the mysterious circumstances of the case. At intervals during the adjourned investigation, he suggested questions, which the Coroner put, but which led to no results. After a patient inquiry, which lasted nearly

three hours, and which exhausted every available source of information, the jury pronounced the customary verdict in cases of sudden death by accident. They added to the formal decision a statement that there had been no evidence to show how the keys had been abstracted, how the fire had been caused, or what the purpose was for which the deceased had entered the vestry. This act closed the proceedings. The legal representative of the dead man was left to provide for the necessities of the interment; and the witnesses were free to retire.

Resolved not to lose a minute in getting to Knowlesbury, I paid my bill at the hotel, and hired a fly to take me to the town. A gentleman who heard me give the order, and who saw that I was going alone, informed me that he lived in the neighbourhood of Knowlesbury, and asked if I would have any objection to his getting home by sharing the fly with me. I accepted his proposal as a matter of course.

Our conversation during the drive was naturally occupied by the one absorbing subject of local interest.

My new acquaintance had some knowledge of the late Sir Percival's solicitor; and he and Mr. Merriman had been discussing the state of the deceased gentleman's affairs and the succession to the property. Sir Percival's embarrassments were so well known all over the county that his solicitor could only make a virtue of necessity and plainly acknowledge them. He had died without leaving a will, and he had no personal property to bequeath, even if he had made one; the whole fortune which he had derived from his wife having been swallowed up by his creditors. The heir to the estate (Sir Percival having left no issue) was a son of Sir Felix Glyde's first cousin—an officer in command of an East

Indiaman. He would find his unexpected inheritance sadly encumbered; but the property would recover with time, and, if 'the captain' was careful, he might be a rich man yet, before he died.

Absorbed as I was in the one idea of getting to London, this information (which events proved to be perfectly correct) had an interest of its own to attract my attention. I thought it justified me in keeping secret my discovery of Sir Percival's fraud. The heir whose rights he had usurped was the heir who would now have the estate. The income from it, for the last three-and-twenty years, which should properly have been his, and which the dead man had squandered to the last farthing, was gone beyond recall. If I spoke, my speaking would confer advantage on no one. If I kept the secret, my silence concealed the character of the man who had cheated Laura into marrying him. For her sake, I wished to conceal it—for her sake, still, I tell this story under feigned names.

I parted with my chance companion at Knowlesbury; and went at once to the town-hall. As I had anticipated, no one was present to prosecute the case against me—the necessary formalities were observed—and I was discharged. On leaving the court, a letter from Mr. Dawson was put into my hand. It informed me that he was absent on professional duty, and it reiterated the offer I had already received from him of any assistance which I might require at his hands. I wrote back, warmly acknowledging my obligations to his kindness, and apologising for not expressing my thanks personally, in consequence of my immediate recall, on pressing business, to town.

Half an hour later I was speeding back to London by the express train.

II.

It was between nine and ten o'clock before I reached Fulham, and found my way to Gower's Walk.

Both Laura and Marian came to the door to let me in. I think we had hardly known how close the tie was which bound us three together, until the evening came which united us again. We met as if we had been parted for months, instead of for a few days only. Marian's face was sadly worn and anxious. I saw who had known all the danger, and borne all the trouble, in my absence, the moment I looked at her. Laura's brighter looks and better spirits told me how carefully she had been spared all knowledge of the dreadful death at Welmingham, and of the true reason for our change of abode.

The stir of the removal seemed to have cheered and interested her. She only spoke of it as a happy thought of Marian's to surprise me, on my return, with a change from the close, noisy street, to the pleasant neighbourhood of trees and fields and the river. She was full of projects for the future—of the drawings she was to finish; of the purchasers I had found in the country, who were to buy them; of the shillings and sixpences she had saved, till her purse was so heavy that she proudly asked me to weigh it in my own hand. The change for the better which had been wrought in her, during the few days of my absence, was a surprise to me for which I was quite unprepared—and for all the unspeakable happiness of seeing it, I was indebted to Marian's courage and to Marian's love.

When Laura had left us, and when we could speak to one another without restraint, I tried to give some

expression to the gratitude and the admiration which filled my heart. But the generous creature would not wait to hear me. That sublime self-forgetfulness of women, which yields so much and asks so little, turned all her thoughts from herself to me.

'I had only a moment left before post-time,' she said, 'or I should have written less abruptly. You look worn and weary, Walter—I am afraid my letter must have seriously alarmed you?'

'Only at first,' I replied. 'My mind was quieted, Marian, by my trust in you. Was I right in attributing this sudden change of place to some threatened annoyance on the part of Count Fosco?'

'Perfectly right,' she said. 'I saw him yesterday; and, worse than that, Walter—I spoke to him.'

'Spoke to him? Did he know where we lived? Did he come to the house?'

'He did. To the house—but not up-stairs. Laura never saw him; Laura suspects nothing. I will tell you how it happened; the danger, I believe and hope, is over now. Yesterday, I was in the sitting-room, at our old lodgings. Laura was drawing at the table; and I was walking about and setting things to rights. I passed the window, and, as I passed it, looked out into the street. There, on the opposite side of the way, I saw the Count, with a man talking to him——'

'Did he notice you at the window?'

'No—at least, I thought not. I was too violently startled to be quite sure.'

'Who was the other man? A stranger?'

'Not a stranger, Walter. As soon as I could draw my breath again, I recognised him. He was the owner of the Lunatic Asylum.'

'Was the Count pointing out the house to him?'

'No; they were talking together as if they had accidentally met in the street. I remained at the window looking at them from behind the curtain. If I had turned round, and if Laura had seen my face at that moment—— Thank God, she was absorbed over her drawing! They soon parted. The man from the Asylum went one way, and the Count the other. I began to hope they were in the street by chance, till I saw the Count come back, stop opposite to us again, take out his card-case and pencil, write something, and then cross the road to the shop below us. I ran past Laura before she could see me, and said I had forgotten something up-stairs. As soon as I was out of the room, I went down to the first landing, and waited—I was determined to stop him if he tried to come up-stairs. He made no such attempt. The girl from the shop came through the door into the passage, with his card in her hand—a large gilt card, with his name, and a coronet above it, and these lines underneath in pencil: "Dear lady" (yes! the villain could address me in that way still)—"dear lady, one word, I implore you, on a matter serious to us both." If one can think at all, in serious difficulties, one thinks quick. I felt directly that it might be a fatal mistake to leave myself and to leave you in the dark, where such a man as the Count was concerned. I felt that the doubt of what he might do, in your absence, would be ten times more trying to me if I declined to see him than if I consented. "Ask the gentleman to wait in the shop," I said. "I will be with him in a moment." I ran up-stairs for my bonnet, being determined not to let him speak to me in-doors. I knew his deep ringing voice; and I was afraid Laura might hear it, even in the shop. In less than a minute I was down again in the passage, and had opened the

door into the street. He came round to meet me from the shop. There he was, in deep mourning, with his smooth bow and his deadly smile, and some idle boys and women near him, staring at his great size, his fine black clothes, and his large cane with the gold knob to it. All the horrible time at Blackwater came back to me the moment I set eyes on him. All the old loathing crept and crawled through me, when he took off his hat with a flourish, and spoke to me, as if we had parted on the friendliest terms hardly a day since.'

'You remember what he said?'

'I can't repeat it, Walter. You shall know directly what he said about *you*—but I can't repeat what he said to *me*. It was worse than the polite insolence of his letter. My hands tingled to strike him, as if I had been a man! I only kept them quiet by tearing his card to pieces under my shawl. Without saying a word on my side, I walked away from the house (for fear of Laura seeing us); and he followed, protesting softly all the way. In the first by-street I turned, and asked him what he wanted with me. He wanted two things. First, if I had no objection, to express his sentiments. I declined to hear them. Secondly, to repeat the warning in his letter. I asked, what occasion there was for repeating it. He bowed and smiled, and said he would explain. The explanation exactly confirmed the fears I expressed before you left us. I told you, if you remember, that Sir Percival would be too headstrong to take his friend's advice where you were concerned; and that there was no danger to be dreaded from the Count till his own interests were threatened, and he was roused into acting for himself?'

'I recollect, Marian.'

'Well; so it has really turned out. The Count

offered his advice; but it was refused. Sir Percival would only take counsel of his own violence, his own obstinacy, and his own hatred of *you*. The Count let him have his way; first privately ascertaining, in case of his own interests being threatened next, where we lived. You were followed, Walter, on returning here, after your first journey to Hampshire—by the lawyer's men for some distance from the railway, and by the Count himself to the door of the house. How he contrived to escape being seen by you, he did not tell me, but he found us out on that occasion, and in that way. Having made the discovery, he took no advantage of it till the news reached him of Sir Percival's death—and then, as I told you, he acted for himself, because he believed you would next proceed against the dead man's partner in the conspiracy. He at once made his arrangements to meet the owner of the Asylum in London, and to take him to the place where his runaway patient was hidden; believing that the results, whichever way they ended, would be to involve you in interminable legal disputes and difficulties, and to tie your hands for all purposes of offence, so far as he was concerned. That was his purpose, on his own confession to me. The only consideration which made him hesitate, at the last moment——'

'Yes?'

'It is hard to acknowledge it, Walter—and yet I must. *I* was the only consideration. No words can say how degraded I feel in my own estimation when I think of it—but the one weak point in that man's iron character is the horrible admiration he feels for *me*. I have tried, for the sake of my own self-respect, to disbelieve it as long as I could; but his looks, his actions, force on me the shameful conviction of the truth. The

eyes of that monster of wickedness moistened while he was speaking to me—they did, Walter! He declared, that at the moment of pointing out the house to the doctor, he thought of my misery if I was separated from Laura, of my responsibility if I was called on to answer for effecting her escape—and he risked the worst that you could do to him the second time, for *my* sake. All he asked was that I would remember the sacrifice, and restrain your rashness, in my own interests—interests which he might never be able to consult again. I made no such bargain with him; I would have died first. But believe him, or not—whether it is true or false that he sent the doctor away with an excuse—one thing is certain, I saw the man leave him, without so much as a glance at our window, or even at our side of the way.'

'I believe it, Marian. The best men are not consistent in good—why should the worst men be consistent in evil? At the same time, I suspect him of merely attempting to frighten you, by threatening what he cannot really do. I doubt his power of annoying us, by means of the owner of the Asylum, now that Sir Percival is dead, and Mrs. Catherick is free from all control. But let me hear more. What did the Count say of me?'

'He spoke last of you. His eyes brightened and hardened, and his manner changed to what I remember it, in past times—to that mixture of pitiless resolution and mountebank mockery which makes it so impossible to fathom him. "Warn Mr. Hartright!" he said, in his loftiest manner. "He has a man of brains to deal with, a man who snaps his big fingers at the laws and conventions of society, when he measures himself with ME. If my lamented friend had taken my advice, the business of the Inquest would have been with the body of Mr.

Hartright. But my lamented friend was obstinate. See! I mourn his loss—inwardly in my soul; outwardly on my hat. This trivial crape expresses sensibilities which I summon Mr. Hartright to respect. They may be transformed to immeasurable enmities, if he ventures to disturb them. Let him be content with what he has got—with what I leave unmolested, for your sake, to him and to you. Say to him (with my compliments), if he stirs me, he has Fosco to deal with. In the English of the Popular Tongue, I inform him—Fosco sticks at nothing! Dear lady, good morning." His cold grey eyes settled on my face—he took off his hat solemnly—bowed, bareheaded—and left me.'

'Without returning? without saying more last words?'

'He turned at the corner of the street, and waved his hand, and then struck it theatrically on his breast. I lost sight of him, after that. He disappeared in the opposite direction to our house; and I ran back to Laura. Before I was in-doors again, I had made up my mind that we must go. The house (especially in your absence) was a place of danger instead of a place of safety, now that the Count had discovered it. If I could have felt certain of your return, I should have risked waiting till you came back. But I was certain of nothing, and I acted at once on my own impulse. You had spoken, before leaving us, of moving into a quieter neighbourhood and purer air, for the sake of Laura's health. I had only to remind her of that, and to suggest surprising you and saving you trouble by managing the move in your absence, to make her quite as anxious for the change as I was. She helped me to pack up your things—and she has arranged them all for you in your new working-room here.'

'What made you think of coming to this place?'

'My ignorance of other localities in the neighbourhood of London. I felt the necessity of getting as far away as possible from our old lodgings; and I knew something of Fulham because I had once been at school there. I despatched a messenger with a note, on the chance that the school might still be in existence. It was in existence; the daughters of my old mistress were carrying it on for her; and they engaged this place from the instructions I had sent. It was just post-time when the messenger returned to me with the address of the house. We moved after dark—we came here quite unobserved. Have I done right, Walter? Have I justified your trust in me?'

I answered her warmly and gratefully, as I really felt. But the anxious look still remained on her face while I was speaking; and the first question she asked, when I had done, related to Count Fosco.

I saw that she was thinking of him now with a changed mind. No fresh outbreak of anger against him, no new appeal to me to hasten the day of reckoning, escaped her. Her conviction that the man's hateful admiration of herself was really sincere, seemed to have increased a hundredfold her distrust of his unfathomable cunning, her inborn dread of the wicked energy and vigilance of all his faculties. Her voice fell low, her manner was hesitating, her eyes searched into mine with an eager fear when she asked me what I thought of his message, and what I meant to do next, after hearing it.

'Not many weeks have passed, Marian,' I answered, 'since my interview with Mr. Kyrle. When he and I parted, the last words I said to him about Laura were these: "Her uncle's house shall open to receive her, in the presence of every soul who followed the false funeral to the grave; the lie that records her death shall be

publicly erased from the tombstone by the authority of the head of the family; and the two men who have wronged her shall answer for their crime to ME, though the justice that sits in tribunals is powerless to pursue them." One of those men is beyond mortal reach. The other remains—and my resolution remains.'

Her eyes lit up; her colour rose. She said nothing; but I saw all her sympathies gathering to mine, in her face.

'I don't disguise from myself, or from you,' I went on, 'that the prospect before us is more than doubtful. The risks we have run already are, it may be, trifles, compared with the risks that threaten us in the future—but the venture shall be tried, Marian, for all that. I am not rash enough to measure myself against such a man as the Count, before I am well prepared for him. I have learnt patience; I can wait my time. Let him believe that his message has produced its effect; let him know nothing of us, and hear nothing of us; let us give him full time to feel secure—his own boastful nature, unless I seriously mistake him, will hasten that result. This is one reason for waiting; but there is another more important still. My position, Marian, towards you and towards Laura, ought to be a stronger one than it is now, before I try our last chance.'

She leaned near to me, with a look of surprise.

'How can it be stronger?' she asked.

'I will tell you,' I replied, 'when the time comes. It has not come yet: it may never come at all. I may be silent about it to Laura for ever—I must be silent, now, even to *you*, till I see for myself that I can harmlessly and honourably speak. Let us leave that subject. There is another which has more pressing claims on our attention. You have kept Laura, mercifully kept her, in ignorance of her husband's death——'

'Oh, Walter, surely it must be long yet, before we tell her of it?'

'No, Marian. Better that you should reveal it to her now, than that accident which no one can guard against, should reveal it to her at some future time. Spare her all the details—break it to her very tenderly—but tell her that he is dead.'

'You have a reason, Walter, for wishing her to know of her husband's death, besides the reason you have just mentioned?'

'I have.'

'A reason connected with that subject which must not be mentioned between us yet?—which may never be mentioned to Laura at all?'

She dwelt on the last words, meaningly. When I answered her, in the affirmative, I dwelt on them too.

Her face grew pale. For a while, she looked at me with a sad, hesitating interest. An unaccustomed tenderness trembled in her dark eyes and softened her firm lips, as she glanced aside at the empty chair in which the dear companion of all our joys and sorrows had been sitting.

'I think I understand,' she said. 'I think I owe it to her and to you, Walter, to tell her of her husband's death.'

She sighed, and held my hand fast for a moment—then dropped it abruptly, and left the room. On the next day, Laura knew that his death had released her, and that the error and the calamity of her life lay buried in his tomb.

His name was mentioned among us no more. Thenceforward, we shrank from the slightest approach to the subject of his death; and, in the same scrupulous

manner, Marian and I avoided all further reference to that other subject, which, by her consent and mine, was not to be mentioned between us yet. It was not the less present to our minds—it was rather kept alive in them by the restraint which we had imposed on ourselves. We both watched Laura more anxiously than ever; sometimes waiting and hoping, sometimes waiting and fearing, till the time came.

By degrees, we returned to our accustomed way of life. I resumed the daily work, which had been suspended during my absence in Hampshire. Our new lodgings cost us more than the smaller and less convenient rooms which we had left; and the claim thus implied on my increased exertions was strengthened by the doubtfulness, of our future prospects. Emergencies might yet happen which would exhaust our little fund at the banker's; and the work of my hands might be, ultimately, all we had to look to for support. More permanent and more lucrative employment than had yet been offered to me was a necessity of our position—a necessity for which I now diligently set myself to provide.

It must not be supposed that the interval of rest and seclusion of which I am now writing, entirely suspended, on my part, all pursuit of the one absorbing purpose with which my thoughts and actions are associated, in these pages. That purpose was, for months and months yet, never to relax its claims on me. The slow ripening of it still left me a measure of precaution to take, an obligation of gratitude to perform, and a doubtful question to solve.

The measure of precaution related, necessarily, to the Count. It was of the last importance to ascertain, if possible, whether his plans committed him to remaining

in England—or, in other words, to remaining within my reach. I contrived to set this doubt at rest by very simple means. His address in St. Johns Wood being known to me, I inquired in the neighbourhood; and having found out the agent who had the disposal of the furnished house in which he lived, I asked if number five, Forest Road, was likely to be let within a reasonable time. The reply was in the negative. I was informed that the foreign gentleman then residing in the house had renewed his term of occupation for another six months, and would remain in possession until the end of June in the following year. We were then at the beginning of December only. I left the agent with my mind relieved from all present fear of the Count's escaping me.

The obligation I had to perform, took me once more into the presence of Mrs. Clements. I had promised to return, and to confide to her those particulars relating to the death and burial of Anne Catherick, which I had been obliged to withhold at our first interview. Changed as circumstances now were, there was no hindrance to my trusting the good woman with as much of the story of the conspiracy as it was necessary to tell. I had every reason that sympathy and friendly feeling could suggest to urge on me the speedy performance of my promise—and I did conscientiously and carefully perform it. There is no need to burden these pages with any statement of what passed at the interview. It will be more to the purpose to say that the interview itself necessarily brought to my mind the one doubtful question still remaining to be solved—the question of Anne Catherick's parentage on the father's side.

A multitude of small considerations in connexion with this subject—trifling enough in themselves, but strik-

ingly important, when massed together—had latterly led my mind to a conclusion which I resolved to verify. I obtained Marian's permission to write to Major Donthorne, of Varneck Hall (where Mrs. Catherick had lived in service for some years previous to her marriage), to ask him certain questions. I made the inquiries in Marian's name, and described them as relating to matters of personal interest in her family, which might explain and excuse my application. When I wrote the letter, I had no certain knowledge that Major Donthorne was still alive; I despatched it on the chance that he might be living, and able and willing to reply.

After a lapse of two days, proof came, in the shape of a letter, that the Major was living, and that he was ready to help us.

The idea in my mind when I wrote to him, and the nature of my inquiries, will be easily inferred from his reply. His letter answered my questions, by communicating these important facts:

In the first place, 'the late Sir Percival Glyde, of Blackwater Park,' had never set foot in Varneck Hall. The deceased gentleman was a total stranger to Major Donthorne, and to all his family.

In the second place, 'the late Mr. Philip Fairlie, of Limmeridge House, had been, in his younger days, the intimate friend and constant guest of Major Donthorne. Having refreshed his memory by looking back to old letters and other papers, the Major was in a position to say positively, that Mr. Philip Fairlie was staying at Varneck Hall in the month of August, eighteen hundred and twenty-six, and that he remained there, for the shooting, during the month of September and part of October following. He then left, to the best of the Major's belief, for Scotland, and did not return to

Varneck Hall till after a lapse of time, when he re-appeared in the character of a newly-married man.

Taken by itself, this statement was, perhaps, of little positive value—but, taken in connexion with certain facts, every one of which either Marian or I knew to be true, it suggested one plain conclusion that was, to our minds, irresistible.

Knowing, now, that Mr. Philip Fairlie had been at Varneck Hall in the autumn of eighteen hundred and twenty-six, and that Mrs. Catherick had been living there in service at the same time, we knew also:—first, that Anne had been born in June, eighteen hundred and twenty-seven; secondly, that she had always presented an extraordinary personal resemblance to Laura; and, thirdly, that Laura herself was strikingly like her father. Mr. Philip Fairlie had been one of the notoriously handsome men of his time. In disposition entirely unlike his brother Frederick, he was the spoilt darling of society, especially of the women—an easy, light-hearted, impulsive, affectionate man; generous to a fault; constitutionally lax in his principles, and notoriously thoughtless of moral obligations where women were concerned. Such were the facts we knew; such was the character of the man. Surely, the plain inference that follows needs no pointing out?

Read by the new light which had now broken upon me, even Mrs. Catherick's letter, in despite of herself, rendered its mite of assistance towards strengthening the conclusion at which I had arrived. She had described Mrs. Fairlie (in writing to me) as 'plain-looking,' and as having 'entrapped the handsomest man in England into marrying her.' Both assertions were gratuitously made, and both were false. Jealous dislike (which, in such a woman as Mrs. Catherick, would express itself

in petty malice rather than not express itself at all) appeared to me to be the only assignable cause for the peculiar insolence of her reference to Mrs. Fairlie, under circumstances which did not necessitate any reference at all.

The mention here of Mrs. Fairlie's name naturally suggests one other question. Did she ever suspect whose child the little girl brought to her at Limmeridge might be?

Marian's testimony was positive on this point. Mrs. Fairlie's letter to her husband, which had been read to me in former days—the letter describing Anne's resemblance to Laura, and acknowledging her affectionate interest in the little stranger—had been written, beyond all question, in perfect innocence of heart. It even seemed doubtful, on consideration, whether Mr. Philip Fairlie himself had been nearer than his wife to any suspicion of the truth. The disgracefully deceitful circumstances under which Mrs. Catherick had married, the purpose of concealment which the marriage was intended to answer, might well keep her silent for caution's sake, perhaps for her own pride's sake also—even assuming that she had the means, in his absence, of communicating with the father of her unborn child.

As this surmise floated through my mind, there rose on my memory the remembrance of the Scripture denunciation which we have all thought of, in our time, with wonder and with awe: 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children.' But for the fatal resemblance between the two daughters of one father, the conspiracy of which Anne had been the innocent instrument and Laura the innocent victim, could never have been planned. With what unerring and terrible direct-

ness the long chain of circumstances led down from the thoughtless wrong committed by the father to the heartless injury inflicted on the child!

These thoughts came to me, and others with them, which drew my mind away to the little Cumberland churchyard where Anne Catherick now lay buried. I thought of the bygone days when I had met her by Mrs. Fairlie's grave, and met her for the last time. I thought of her poor helpless hands beating on the tombstone, and her weary, yearning words, murmured to the dead remains of her protectress and her friend. 'Oh, if I could die, and be hidden and at rest with *you!*' Little more than a year had passed since she breathed that wish; and how inscrutably, how awfully, it had been fulfilled! The words she had spoken to Laura by the shores of the lake, the very words had now come true. 'Oh, if I could only be buried with your mother! If I could only wake at her side when the angel's trumpet sounds, and the graves give up their dead at the resurrection!' Through what mortal crime and horror, through what darkest windings of the way down to Death, the lost creature had wandered in God's leading to the last home that, living, she never hoped to reach! In that sacred rest, I leave her—in that dread companionship, let her remain undisturbed.

So the ghostly figure which has haunted these pages as it haunted my life, goes down into the impenetrable Gloom. Like a Shadow she first came to me, in the loneliness of the night. Like a Shadow she passes away, in the loneliness of the dead.

III.

Four months elapsed. April came—the month of Spring; the month of change.

The course of Time had flowed through the interval since the winter, peacefully and happily in our new home. I had turned my long leisure to good account; had largely increased my sources of employment; and had placed our means of subsistence on surer grounds. Freed from the suspense and the anxiety which had tried her so sorely, and hung over her so long, Marian's spirits rallied; and her natural energy of character began to assert itself again, with something, if not all, of the freedom and the vigour of former times.

More pliable under change than her sister, Laura showed more plainly the progress made by the healing influences of her new life. The worn and wasted look which had prematurely aged her face, was fast leaving it; and the expression which had been the first of its charms in past days, was the first of its beauties that now returned. My closest observation of her detected but one serious result of the conspiracy which had once threatened her reason and her life. Her memory of events, from the period of her leaving Blackwater Park to the period of our meeting in the burial-ground of Limmeridge church, was lost beyond all hope of recovery. At the slightest reference to that time, she changed and trembled still; her words became confused; her memory wandered and lost itself as helplessly as ever. Here, and here only, the traces of the past lay deep—too deep to be effaced.

In all else, she was now so far on the way to recovery, that, on her best and brightest days, she sometimes

looked and spoke like the Laura of old times. The happy change wrought its natural result in us both. From their long slumber, on her side and on mine, those imperishable memories of our past life in Cumberland now awoke, which were one and all alike, the memories of our love.

Gradually and insensibly, our daily relations towards each other became constrained. The fond words which I had spoken to her so naturally, in the days of her sorrow and her suffering, faltered strangely on my lips. In the time when my dread of losing her was most present to my mind, I had always kissed her when she left me at night and when she met me in the morning. The kiss seemed now to have dropped between us—to be lost out of our lives. Our hands began to tremble again when they met. We hardly ever looked long at one another out of Marian's presence. The talk often flagged between us when we were alone. When I touched her by accident, I felt my heart beating fast, as it used to beat at Limmeridge House—I saw the lovely answering flush glowing again in her cheeks, as if we were back among the Cumberland Hills, in our past characters of master and pupil once more. She had long intervals of silence and thoughtfulness; and denied she had been thinking, when Marian asked her the question. I surprised myself, one day, neglecting my work, to dream over the little water-colour portrait of her which I had taken in the summer-house where we first met—just as I used to neglect Mr. Fairlie's drawings, to dream over the same likeness, when it was newly finished in the bygone time. Changed as all the circumstances now were, our position towards each other in the golden days of our first companionship, seemed to be revived with the revival of our love. It

was as if Time had drifted us back on the wreck of our early hopes, to the old familiar shore!

To any other woman, I could have spoken the decisive words which I still hesitated to speak to *her*. The utter helplessness of her position; her friendless dependence on all the forbearing gentleness that I could show her; my fear of touching too soon some secret sensitiveness in her, which my instinct, as a man, might not have been fine enough to discover—these considerations, and others like them, kept me self-distrustfully silent. And yet, I knew that the restraint on both sides must be ended; that the relations in which we stood towards one another must be altered, in some settled manner, for the future; and that it rested with me, in the first instance, to recognise the necessity for a change.

The more I thought of our position, the harder the attempt to alter it appeared, while the domestic conditions on which we three had been living together since the winter, remained undisturbed. I cannot account for the capricious state of mind in which this feeling originated—but the idea nevertheless possessed me, that some previous change of place and circumstances, some sudden break in the quiet monotony of our lives, so managed as to vary the home aspect under which we had been accustomed to see each other, might prepare the way for me to speak, and might make it easier and less embarrassing for Laura and Marian to hear.

With this purpose in view, I said, one morning, that I thought we had all earned a little holiday and a change of scene. After some consideration, it was decided that we should go for a fortnight to the sea-side.

On the next day, we left Fulham for a quiet town on the south coast. At that early season of the year, we

were the only visitors in the place. The cliffs, the beach, and the walks inland, were all in the solitary condition which was most welcome to us. The air was mild; the prospects over hill and wood and down were beautifully varied by the shifting April light and shade; and the restless sea leapt under our windows, as if it felt, like the land, the glow and freshness of spring.

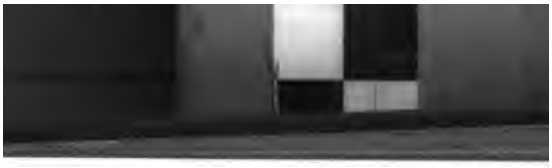
I owed it to Marian to consult her before I spoke to Laura, and to be guided afterwards by her advice.

On the third day from our arrival, I found a fit opportunity of speaking to her alone. The moment we looked at one another, her quick instinct detected the thought in my mind before I could give it expression. With her customary energy and directness, she spoke at once, and spoke first.

'You are thinking of that subject which was mentioned between us on the evening of your return from Hampshire,' she said. 'I have been expecting you to allude to it, for some time past. There must be a change in our little household, Walter; we cannot go on much longer as we are now. I see it as plainly as you do—as plainly as Laura sees it, though she says nothing. How strangely the old times in Cumberland seem to have come back! You and I are together again; and the one subject of interest between us is Laura once more. I could almost fancy that this room is the summer-house at Limmeridge, and that those waves beyond us are beating on *our* sea-shore.'

'I was guided by your advice in those past days,' I said; 'and now, Marian, with reliance tenfold greater, I will be guided by it again.'

She answered by pressing my hand. I saw that she was deeply touched by my reference to the past. We sat together near the window; and, while I spoke and



she listened, we looked at the glory of the sunlight shining on the majesty of the sea.

'Whatever comes of this confidence between us,' I said, 'whether it ends happily or sorrowfully for *me*, Laura's interests will still be the interests of my life. When we leave this place, on whatever terms we leave it, my determination to wrest from Count Fosco the confession which I failed to obtain from his accomplice, goes back with me to London, as certainly as I go back myself. Neither you nor I can tell how that man may turn on me, if I bring him to bay; we only know by his own words and actions, that he is capable of striking at me; through Laura, without a moment's hesitation. or a moment's remorse. In our present position, I have no claim on her, which society sanctions, which the law allows, to strengthen me in resisting *him*, and in protecting *her*. This places me at a serious disadvantage. If I am to fight our cause with the Count, strong in the consciousness of Laura's safety, I must fight it for my Wife. Do you agree to that, Marian, so far?'

'To every word of it,' she answered.

'I will not plead out of my own heart,' I went on; 'I will not appeal to the love which has survived all changes and all shocks—I will rest my only vindication of myself for thinking of her and speaking of her as my wife, on what I have just said. If the chance of forcing a confession from the Count, is, as I believe it to be, the last chance left of publicly establishing the fact of Laura's existence, the least selfish reason that I can advance for our marriage is recognised by us both. But I may be wrong in my conviction; other means of achieving our purpose may be in our power, which are less uncertain and less dangerous. I have searched anxiously, in

my own mind, for those means—and I have not found them. Have you?'

'No. I have thought about it too, and thought in vain.'

'In all likelihood,' I continued, 'the same questions have occurred to you, in considering this difficult subject, which have occurred to me. Ought we to return with her to Limmeridge, now that she is like herself again, and trust to the recognition of her by the people of the village, or by the children at the school? Ought we to appeal to the practical test of her handwriting? Suppose we did so. Suppose the recognition of her obtained, and the identity of the handwriting established. Would success in both those cases do more than supply an excellent foundation for a trial in a court of law? Would the recognition and the handwriting prove her identity to Mr. Fairlie and take her back to Limmeridge House, against the evidence of her aunt, against the evidence of the medical certificate, against the fact of the funeral and the fact of the inscription on the tomb? No! We could only hope to succeed in throwing a serious doubt on the assertion of her death—a doubt which nothing short of a legal inquiry can settle. I will assume that we possess (what we have certainly not got) money enough to carry this inquiry on through all its stages. I will assume that Mr. Fairlie's prejudices might be reasoned away; that the false testimony of the Count and his wife, and all the rest of the false testimony, might be confuted; that the recognition could not possibly be ascribed to a mistake between Laura and Anne Catherick, or the handwriting be declared by our enemies to be a clever fraud —all these are assumptions which, more or less, set plain probabilities at defiance, but let them pass—and

let us ask ourselves what would be the first consequence of the first questions put to Laura herself on the subject of the conspiracy. We know only too well what the consequence would be—for we know that she has never recovered her memory of what happened to her in London. Examine her privately, or examine her publicly, she is utterly incapable of assisting the assertion of her own case. If you don't see this, Marian, as plainly as I see it, we will go to Limmeridge and try the experiment, to-morrow.'

'I *do* see it, Walter. Even if we had the means of paying all the law expenses, even if we succeeded in the end, the delays would be unendurable; the perpetual suspense, after what we have suffered already, would be heart-breaking. You are right about the hopelessness of going to Limmeridge. I wish I could feel sure that you are right also in determining to try that last chance with the Count. *Is* it a chance at all?'

'Beyond a doubt, Yes. It is the chance of recovering the lost date of Laura's journey to London. Without returning to the reasons I gave you some time since, I am still as firmly persuaded as ever, that there is a discrepancy between the date of that journey and the date on the certificate of death. There lies the weak point of the whole conspiracy—it crumbles to pieces if we attack it in that way; and the means of attacking it are in possession of the Count. If I succeed in wresting them from him, the object of your life and mine is fulfilled. If I fail, the wrong that Laura has suffered will, in this world, never be redressed.'

'Do you fear failure, yourself, Walter?'

'I dare not anticipate success; and, for that very reason, Marian, I speak openly and plainly, as I have spoken now. In my heart and my conscience, I can

say it—Laura's hopes for the future are at their lowest ebb. I know that her fortune is gone; I know that the last chance of restoring her to her place in the world lies at the mercy of her worst enemy, of a man who is now absolutely unassailable, and who may remain unassailable to the end. With every worldly advantage gone from her; with all prospect of recovering her rank and station more than doubtful; with no clearer future before her than the future which her husband can provide—the poor drawing-master may harmlessly open his heart at last. In the days of her prosperity, Marian, I was only the teacher who guided her hand—I ask for it, in her adversity, as the hand of my wife!'

Marian's eyes met mine affectionately—I could say no more. My heart was full, my lips were trembling. In spite of myself, I was in danger of appealing to her pity. I got up to leave the room. She rose at the same moment, laid her hand gently on my shoulder, and stopped me.

'Walter!' she said, 'I once parted you both, for your good and for hers. Wait here, my Brother!—wait, my dearest, best friend, till Laura comes, and tells you what I have done now!'

For the first time since the farewell morning at Limmeridge, she touched my forehead with her lips. A tear dropped on my face, as she kissed me. She turned quickly, pointed to the chair from which I had risen, and left the room.

I sat down alone at the window, to wait through the crisis of my life. My mind, in that breathless interval, felt like a total blank. I was conscious of nothing but a painful intensity of all familiar perceptions. The sun grew blinding bright; the white sea birds chasing each other far beyond me, seemed to be flitting before my

face; the mellow murmur of the waves on the beach was like thunder in my ears.

The door opened; and Laura came in alone. So she had entered the breakfast-room at Limmeridge House, on the morning when we parted. Slowly and falteringly, in sorrow and in hesitation, she had once approached me. Now, she came with the haste of happiness in her feet, with the light of happiness radiant in her face. Of their own accord, those dear arms clasped themselves round me; of their own accord, the sweet lips came to meet mine. 'My darling!' she whispered, 'we may own we love each other, now?' Her head nestled with a tender contentedness on my bosom. 'Oh,' she said, innocently, 'I am so happy at last!'

Ten days later, we were happier still. We were married.

IV.

The course of this narrative, steadily flowing on, bears me away from the morning-time of our married life, and carries me forward to the end.

In a fortnight more we three were back in London; and the shadow was stealing over us of the struggle to come.

Marian and I were careful to keep Laura in ignorance of the cause that had hurried us back—the necessity of making sure of the Count. It was now the beginning of May, and his term of occupation at the house in Forest Road expired in June. If he renewed it (and I had reasons, shortly to be mentioned, for anticipating that he would), I might be certain of his not escaping me. But, if by any chance he disappointed my expec-

tations, and left the country—then, I had no time to lose in arming myself to meet him as best I might.

In the first fulness of my new happiness, there had been moments when my resolution faltered—moments, when I was tempted to be safely content, now that the dearest aspiration of my life was fulfilled in the possession of Laura's love. For the first time, I thought faint-heartedly of the greatness of the risk; of the adverse chances arrayed against me: of the fair promise of our new lives, and of the peril in which I might place the happiness which we had so hardly earned. Yes! let me own it honestly. For a brief time, I wandered, in the sweet guiding of love, far from the purpose to which I had been true, under sterner discipline and in darker days. Innocently, Laura had tempted me aside from the hard path—innocently, she was destined to lead me back again.

At times, dreams of the terrible past still disconnectedly recalled to her, in the mystery of sleep, the events of which her waking memory had lost all trace. One night (barely two weeks after our marriage), when I was watching her at rest, I saw the tears come slowly through her closed eyelids, I heard the faint murmuring words escape her which told me that her spirit was back again on the fatal journey from Blackwater Park. That unconscious appeal, so touching and so awful in the sacredness of her sleep, ran through me like fire. The next day was the day we came back to London—the day when my resolution returned to me with tenfold strength.

The first necessity was to know something of the man. Thus far, the true story of his life was an impenetrable mystery to me.

I began with such scanty sources of information as

were at my own disposal. The important narrative written by Mr. Frederick Fairlie (which Marian had obtained by following the directions I had given to her in the winter) proved to be of no service to the special object with which I now looked at it. While reading it, I reconsidered the disclosure revealed to me by Mrs. Clements, of the series of deceptions which had brought Anne Catherick to London, and which had there devoted her to the interests of the conspiracy. Here, again, the Count had not openly committed himself; here, again, he was, to all practical purpose, out of my reach.

I next returned to Marian's journal at Blackwater Park. At my request she read to me again a passage which referred to her past curiosity about the Count, and to the few particulars which she had discovered relating to him.

The passage to which I allude occurs in that part of her journal which delineates his character and his personal appearance. She describes him as 'not having crossed the frontiers of his native country for years past'— as 'anxious to know if any Italian gentlemen were settled in the nearest town to Blackwater Park'— as 'receiving letters with all sorts of odd stamps on them, and one with a large, official-looking seal on it.' She is inclined to consider that his long absence from his native country may be accounted for by assuming that he is a political exile. But she is, on the other hand, unable to reconcile this idea with the reception of the letter from abroad, bearing 'the large official-looking seal'—letters from the Continent addressed to political exiles being usually the last to court attention from foreign post-offices in that way.

The considerations thus presented to me in the diary,

joined to certain surmises of my own that grew out of them, suggested a conclusion which I wondered I had not arrived at before. I now said to myself—what Laura had once said to Marian at Blackwater Park; what Madame Fosco had overheard by listening at the door—the Count is a Spy!

Laura had applied the word to him at hazard, in natural anger at his proceedings towards herself. *I* applied it to him, with the deliberate conviction that his vocation in life was the vocation of a Spy. On this assumption the reason for his extraordinary stay in England, so long after the objects of the conspiracy had been gained, became, to my mind, quite intelligible.

The year of which I am now writing, was the year of the famous Crystal Palace Exhibition in Hyde Park. Foreigners, in unusually large numbers, had arrived already, and were still arriving in England. Men were among us, by hundreds, whom the ceaseless distrustfulness of their governments had followed privately, by means of appointed agents, to our shores. My surmises did not for a moment class a man of the Count's abilities and social position with the ordinary rank and file of foreign spies. I suspected him of holding a position of authority, of being entrusted by the government which he secretly served, with the organisation and management of agents specially employed in this country, both men and women; and I believed Mrs. Rubelle, who had been so opportunely found to act as nurse at Blackwater Park, to be, in all probability, one of the number.

Assuming that this idea of mine had a foundation in truth, the position of the Count might prove to be more assailable than I had hitherto ventured to hope. To whom could I apply to know something more of the

man's history, and of the man himself, than I knew now.

In this emergency, it naturally occurred to my mind that a countryman of his own, on whom I could rely, might be the fittest person to help me. The first man whom I thought of, under these circumstances, was also the only Italian with whom I was intimately acquainted —my quaint little friend, Professor Pesca.

The professor has been so long absent from these pages, that he has run some risk of being forgotten altogether.

It is the necessary law of such a story as mine, that the persons concerned in it only appear when the course of events takes them up—they come and go, not by favour of my personal partiality, but by right of their direct connexion with the circumstances to be detailed. For this reason, not Pesca only, but my mother and sister as well, have been left far in the background of the narrative. My visits to the Hampstead cottage; my mother's belief in the denial of Laura's identity which the conspiracy had accomplished; my vain efforts to overcome the prejudice, on her part and on my sister's, to which, in their jealous affection for me, they both continued to adhere; the painful necessity which that prejudice imposed on me of concealing my marriage from them till they had learned to do justice to my wife —all these little domestic occurrences have been left unrecorded, because they were not essential to the main interest of the story. It is nothing that they added to my anxieties and embittered my disappointments—the steady march of events has inexorably passed them by.

For the same reason, I have said nothing, here, of the consolation that I found in Pesca's brotherly affection

for me, when I saw him again after the sudden cessation of my residence at Limmeridge House. I have not recorded the fidelity with which my warm-hearted little friend followed me to the place of embarkation, when I sailed for Central America, or the noisy transport of joy with which he received me when we next met in London. If I had felt justified in accepting the offers of service which he made to me, on my return, he would have appeared again, long ere this. But, though I knew that his honour and his courage were to be implicitly relied on, I was not so sure that his discretion was to be trusted; and, for that reason only, I followed the course of all my inquiries alone. It will now be sufficiently understood that Pesca was not separated from all connexion with me and my interests, although he has hitherto been separated from all connexion with the progress of this narrative. He was as true and as ready a friend of mine still, as ever he had been in his life.

Before I summoned Pesca to my assistance, it was necessary to see for myself what sort of man I had to deal with. Up to this time, I had never once set eyes on Count Fosco.

Three days after my return with Laura and Marian to London, I set forth alone for Forest Road, St. John's Wood, between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning. It was a fine day—I had some hours to spare—and I thought it likely, if I waited a little for him, that the Count might be tempted out. I had no great reason to fear the chance of his recognising me in the day-time, for the only occasion when I had been seen by him was the occasion on which he had followed me home at night.

No one appeared at the windows in the front of the

house. I walked down a turning which ran past the side of it, and looked over the low garden wall. One of the back windows on the lower floor was thrown up, and a net was stretched across the opening, I saw nobody; but I heard, in the room, first a shrill whistling and singing of birds—then, the deep ringing voice which Marian's description had made familiar to me. 'Come out on my little finger, my pret-pret-pretties!' cried the voice. 'Come out, and hop up-stairs! One, two, three—and up? Three, two, one—and down! One, two, three—twit-twit-twit-tweet!' The Count was exercising his canaries, as he used to exercise them in Marian's time, at Blackwater Park.

I waited a little while, and the singing and the whistling ceased. 'Come, kiss me, my pretties!' said the deep voice. There was a responsive twittering and chirping—a low, oily laugh—a silence of a minute or so—and then I heard the opening of the house door. I turned, and retraced my steps. The magnificent melody of the Prayer in Rossini's 'Moses,' sung in a sonorous bass voice, rose grandly through the suburban silence of the place. The front garden gate opened and closed. The Count had come out.

He crossed the road, and walked towards the western boundary of the Regent's Park. I kept on my own side of the way, a little behind him, and walked in that direction also.

Marian had prepared me for his high stature, his monstrous corpulence, and his ostentatious mourning garments—but not for the horrible freshness and cheerfulness and vitality of the man. He carried his sixty years as if they had been fewer than forty. He sauntered along, wearing his hat a little on one side, with a light jaunty step; swinging his big stick; humming to

himself; looking up, from time to time, at the houses and gardens on either side of him, with superb, smiling patronage. If a stranger had been told that the whole neighbourhood belonged to him, that stranger would not have been surprised to hear it. He never looked back: he paid no apparent attention to me, no apparent attention to any one who passed him on his own side of the road—except, now and then, when he smiled and smirked, with an easy, paternal good humour, at the nursery maids and the children whom he met. In this way, he led me on, till we reached a colony of shops outside the western terraces of the Park.

Here, he stopped at a pastrycook's, went in (probably to give an order), and came out again immediately with a tart in his hand. An Italian was grinding an organ before the shop, and a miserable little shrivelled monkey was sitting on the instrument. The Count stopped; bit a piece for himself out of the tart; and gravely handed the rest to the monkey. 'My poor little man!' he said, with grotesque tenderness; 'you look hungry. In the sacred name of humanity, I offer you some lunch!' The organ-grinder piteously put in his claim to a penny from the benevolent stranger. The Count shrugged his shoulders contemptuously—and passed on.

We reached the streets and the better class of shops, between the New Road and Oxford Street. The Count stopped again, and entered a small optician's shop, with an inscription in the window, announcing that repairs were neatly executed inside. He came out again, with an opera-glass in his hand; walked a few paces on; and stopped to look at a bill of the Opera, placed outside a music-seller's shop. He read the bill attentively, considered a moment, and then hailed an

empty cab as it passed him. 'Opera-box-office,' he said to the man—and was driven away.

I crossed the road, and looked at the bill in my turn. The performance announced was 'Lucrezia Borgia,' and it was to take place that evening. The opera-glass in the Count's hand, his careful reading of the bill, and his direction to the cabman, all suggested that he proposed making one of the audience. I had the means of getting an admission for myself and a friend, to the pit, by applying to one of the scene-painters attached to the theatre, with whom I had been well acquainted in past times. There was a chance, at least, that the Count might be easily visible among the audience, to me, and to any one with me; and, in this case, I had the means of ascertaining whether Pesca knew his countryman, or not, that very night.

This consideration at once decided the disposal of my evening. I procured the tickets, leaving a note at the Professor's lodgings on the way. At a quarter to eight, I called to take him with me to the theatre. My little friend was in a state of the highest excitement, with a festive flower in his button-hole, and the largest opera-glass I ever saw hugged up under his arm.

'Are you ready?' I asked.

'Right-all-right,' said Pesca.

We started for the theatre.

V.

The last notes of the introduction to the opera were being played, and the seats in the pit were all filled, when Pesca and I reached the theatre.

There was plenty of room, however, in the passage that ran round the pit—precisely the position best calcu-

lated to answer the purpose for which I was attending the performance. I went first to the barrier separating us from the stalls; and looked for the Count in that part of the theatre. He was not there. Returning along the passage, on the left-hand side from the stage, and looking about me attentively, I discovered him in the pit. He occupied an excellent place, some twelve or fourteen seats from the end of a bench, within three rows of the stalls. I placed myself exactly on a line with him; Pesca standing by my side. The Professor was not yet aware of the purpose for which I had brought him to the theatre, and he was rather surprised that we did not move nearer to the stage.

The curtain rose, and the opera began.

Throughout the whole of the first act, we remained in our position; the Count, absorbed by the orchestra and the stage, never casting so much as a chance glance at us. Not a note of Donizetti's delicious music was lost on him. There he sat, high above his neighbours, smiling, and nodding his great head enjoyingly, from time to time. When the people near him applauded the close of an air (as an English audience in such circumstances always *will* applaud), without the least consideration for the orchestral movement which immediately followed it, he looked round at them with an expression of compassionate remonstrance, and held up one hand with a gesture of polite entreaty. At the more refined passages of the singing, at the more delicate phrases of the music, which passed unapplauded by others, his fat hands adorned with perfectly-fitting black kid gloves, softly patted each other, in token of the cultivated appreciation of a musical man. At such times, his oily murmur of approval, 'Bravo! Bra-a-a-a!' hummed through the silence, like the purr-

ing of a great cat. His immediate neighbours on either side—hearty, ruddy-faced people from the country, basking amazedly in the sunshine of fashionable London—seeing and hearing him, began to follow his lead. Many a burst of applause from the pit, that night, started from the soft, comfortable patting of the black-gloved hands. The man's voracious vanity devoured this implied tribute to his local and critical supremacy, with an appearance of the highest relish. Smiles rippled continuously over his fat face. He looked about him, at the pauses in the music, serenely satisfied with himself and his fellow-creatures. 'Yes! Yes! these barbarous English people are learning something from ME. Here, there, and everywhere, I—Fosco—am an Influence that is felt, a Man who sits supreme!' If ever face spoke, his face spoke then—and that was his language.

The curtain fell on the first act; and the audience rose to look about them. This was the time I had waited for—the time to try if Pesca knew him.

He rose with the rest, and surveyed the occupants of the boxes grandly with his opera-glass. At first, his back was towards us; but he turned round in time, to our side of the theatre, and looked at the boxes above us; using his glass for a few minutes—then removing it, but still continuing to look up. This was the moment I chose, when his full face was in view, for directing Pesca's attention to him.

'Do you know that man?' I asked.

'Which man, my friend?'

'The tall, fat man, standing there, with his face towards us.'

Pesca raised himself on tiptoe, and looked at the Count.

'No,' said the Professor. 'The big fat man is a stranger to me. Is he famous? Why do you point him out?'

'Because I have particular reasons for wishing to know something of him. He is a countryman of yours; his name is Count Fosco. Do you know that name?'

'Not I, Walter. Neither the name nor the man is known to me.'

'Are you quite sure you don't recognise him? Look again; look carefully. I will tell you why I am so anxious about it, when we leave the theatre. Stop! let me help you up here, where you can see him better.'

I helped the little man to perch himself on the edge of the raised dais upon which the pit-seats were all placed. Here, his small stature was no hindrance to him; here, he could see over the heads of the ladies who were seated near the outermost part of the bench.

A slim, light-haired man, standing by us, whom I had not noticed before—a man with a scar on his left cheek—looked attentively at Pesca as I helped him up, and then looked still more attentively, following the direction of Pesca's eyes, at the Count. Our conversation might have reached his ears, and might, as it struck me, have roused his curiosity.

Meanwhile, Pesca fixed his eyes earnestly on the broad, full, smiling face turned a little upward, exactly opposite to him.

'No,' he said; 'I have never set my two eyes on that big fat man before, in all my life.'

As he spoke, the Count looked downwards towards the boxes behind us on the pit tier.

The eyes of the two Italians met.

The instant before, I had been perfectly satisfied, from his own reiterated assertion, that Pesca did not

know the Count. The instant afterwards, I was equally certain that the Count knew Pesca.

Knew him; and—more surprising still—*feared* him as well! There was no mistaking the change that passed over the villain's face. The leaden hue that altered his yellow complexion in a moment, the sudden rigidity of all his features, the furtive scrutiny of his cold grey eyes, the motionless stillness of him from head to foot, told their own tale. A mortal dread had mastered him, body and soul—and his own recognition of Pesca was the cause of it!

The slim man, with the scar on his cheek, was still close by us. He had apparently drawn his inference from the effect produced on the Count by the sight of Pesca, as I had drawn mine. He was a mild gentleman-like man, looking like a foreigner; and his interest in our proceedings was not expressed in anything approaching to an offensive manner.

For my own part, I was so startled by the change in the Count's face, so astounded at the entirely unexpected turn which events had taken, that I knew neither what to say or do next. Pesca roused me by stepping back to his former place at my side, and speaking first.

'How the fat man stares!' he exclaimed. 'Is it at *me?* Am *I* famous? How can he know me, when I don't know him?'

I kept my eyes still on the Count. I saw him move for the first time when Pesca moved, so as not to lose sight of the little man, in the lower position in which he now stood. I was curious to see what would happen if Pesca's attention, under these circumstances, was withdrawn from him, and I accordingly asked the Professor if he recognised any of his pupils, that evening,

among the ladies in the boxes. Pesca immediately raised the large opera-glass to his eyes, and moved it slowly all round the upper part of the theatre, searching for his pupils with the most conscientious scrutiny.

The moment he showed himself to be thus engaged, the Count turned round; slipped past the persons who occupied seats on the farther side of him from where he stood; and disappeared in the middle passage down the centre of the pit. I caught Pesca by the arm; and, to his inexpressible astonishment, hurried him round with me to the back of the pit, to intercept the Count before he could get to the door. Somewhat to my surprise, the slim man hastened out before us, avoiding a stoppage caused by some people on our side of the pit leaving their places, by which Pesca and myself were delayed. When we reached the lobby the Count had disappeared—and the foreigner with the scar was gone too.

'Come home,' I said; 'come home, Pesca, to your lodgings. I must speak to you in private—I must speak directly.'

'My-soul-bless-my-soul!' cried the Professor, in a state of the extremest bewilderment. 'What on earth is the matter?'

I walked on rapidly, without answering. The circumstances under which the Count had left the theatre suggested to me that his extraordinary anxiety to escape Pesca might carry him to further extremities still. He might escape *me*, too, by leaving London. I doubted the future, if I allowed him so much as a day's freedom to act as he pleased. And I doubted that foreign stranger who had got the start of us, and whom I suspected of intentionally following him out.

With this double distrust in my mind, I was not long

in making Pesca understand what I wanted. As soon as we two were alone in his room, I increased his confusion and amazement a hundredfold by telling him what my purpose was, as plainly and unreservedly as I have acknowledged it here.

'My friend, what can I do?' cried the Professor, piteously appealing to me with both hands. 'Deuce-what-the-deuce! how can I help you, Walter, when I don't know the man?'

'*He* knows *you*—he is afraid of you—he has left the theatre to escape you. Pesca! there must be a reason for this. Look back into your own life, before you came to England. You left Italy, as you have told me yourself, for political reasons. You have never mentioned those reasons to me; and I don't inquire into them, now. I only ask you to consult your own recollections, and to say if they suggest no past cause for the terror which the first sight of you produced in that man.

To my unutterable surprise, these words, harmless as they appeared to *me*, produced the same astounding effect on Pesca which the sight of Pesca had produced on the Count. The rosy face of my little friend whitened in an instant; and he drew back from me slowly, trembling from head to foot.

'Walter!' he said. 'You don't know what you ask.'

He spoke in a whisper—he looked at me as if I had suddenly revealed to him some hidden danger to both of us. In less than one minute of time, he was so altered from the easy, lively, quaint little man of all my past experience, that if I had met him in the street, changed as I saw him now, I should most certainly not have known him again.

'Forgive me, if I have unintentionally pained and shocked you,' I replied. 'Remember the cruel wrong

my wife has suffered at Count Fosco's hands. Remember that the wrong can never be redressed, unless the means are in my power of forcing him to do her justice. I spoke in *her* interests, Pesca—I ask you again to forgive me—I can say no more.'

I rose to go. He stopped me before I reached the door.

'Wait,' he said. 'You have shaken me from head to foot. You don't know how I left my country, and why I left my country. Let me compose myself—let me think, if I can.'

I returned to my chair. He walked up and down the room, talking to himself incoherently in his own language. After several turns backwards and forwards, he suddenly came up to me, and laid his little hands with a strange tenderness and solemnity on my breast.

'On your heart and soul, Walter,' he said, 'is there no other way to get to that man but the chance way through *me?*'

'There is no other way,' I answered.

He left me again: opened the door of the room and looked out cautiously into the passage; closed it once more; and came back.

'You won your right over me, Walter,' he said, 'on the day when you saved my life. It was yours from that moment, when you pleased to take it. Take it now. Yes! I mean what I say. My next words, as true as the good God is above us, will put my life into your hands.'

The trembling earnestness with which he uttered this extraordinary warning, carried with it to my mind the conviction that he spoke the truth.

'Mind this!' he went on, shaking his hands at me in the vehemence of his agitation. 'I hold no thread, in

my own mind, between that man, Fosco, and the past time which I call back to me. for your sake. If *you* find the thread, keep it to yourself—tell me nothing—on my knees, I beg and pray, let me be ignorant, let me be innocent, let me be blind to all the future, as I am now!'

He said a few words more, hesitatingly and disconnectedly—then stopped again.

I saw that the effort of expressing himself in English, on an occasion too serious to permit him the use of the quaint turns and phrases of his ordinary vocabulary, was painfully increasing the difficulty he had felt from the first in speaking to me at all. Having learnt to read and understand his native language (though not to speak it), in the earlier days of our intimate companionship, I now suggested to him that he should express himself in Italian, while I used English in putting any questions which might be necessary to my enlightenment. He accepted the proposal. In his smooth-flowing language—spoken with a vehement agitation which betrayed itself in the perpetual working of his features, in the wildness and the suddenness of his foreign gesticulations, but never in the raising of his voice—I now heard the words which armed me to meet the last struggle that is left for this story to record.*

'You know nothing of my motive for leaving Italy,' he began, 'except that it was for political reasons. If I had been driven to this country by the persecution of my government, I should not have kept those reasons a secret from you or from any one. I have concealed

*It is only right to mention here, that I repeat Pesca's statement to me with the careful suppressions and alterations which the serious nature of the subject and my own sense of duty to my friend demand. My first and last concealments from the reader are those which caution renders absolutely necessary in this portion of the narrative.

them because no government authority has pronounced the sentence of my exile. You have heard, Walter, of the political Societies that are hidden in every great city on the continent of Europe? To one of those Societies I belonged in Italy—and belong still, in England. When I came to this country, I came by the direction of my Chief. I was over-zealous, in my younger time; I ran the risk of compromising myself and others. For those reasons, I was ordered to emigrate to England, and to wait. I emigrated—I have waited—I wait, still. To-morrow, I may be called away: ten years hence, I may be called away. It is all one to me—I am here, I support myself by teaching, and I wait. I violate no oath (you shall hear why presently) in making my confidence complete by telling you the name of the Society to which I belong. All I do is to put my life in your hands. If what I say to you now is ever known by others to have passed my lips, as certainly as we two sit here, I am a dead man.'

He whispered the next words in my ear. I keep the secret which he thus communicated. The Society to which he belonged will be sufficiently individualised for the purpose of these pages if I call it 'The Brotherhood,' on the few occasions when any reference to the subject will be needed in this place.

'The object of the Brotherhood,' Pesca went on, 'is, briefly, the object of other political societies of the same sort—the destruction of tyranny, and the assertion of the rights of the people. The principles of the Brotherhood are two. So long as a man's life is useful, or even harmless only, he has the right to enjoy it. But, if his life inflicts injury on the well-being of his fellow-men, from that moment he forfeits the right, and it is not only no crime but a positive merit to deprive him

of it. It is not for me to say in what frightful circumstances of oppression and suffering this Society took its rise. It is not for you to say—you Englishmen, who have conquered your freedom so long ago, that you have conveniently forgotten what blood you shed, and what extremities you proceeded to, in the conquering—it is not for *you* to say how far the worst of all exasperations may, or may not, carry the maddened men of an enslaved nation. The iron that has entered into our souls has gone too deep for *you* to find it. Leave the refugee alone! Laugh at him, distrust him, open your eyes in wonder at that secret self which smoulders in him, sometimes under the every-day respectability and tranquillity of a man like me; sometimes under the grinding poverty, the fierce squalor, of men less lucky, less pliable, less patient than I am—but judge us not! In the time of your first Charles you might have done us justice; the long luxury of your own freedom has made you incapable of doing us justice now.'

All the deepest feelings of his nature seemed to force themselves to the surface in those words; all his heart was poured out to me, for the first time in our lives—but still, his voice never rose; still his dread of the terrible revelation he was making to me, never left him.

'So far,' he resumed, 'you think the Society like other Societies. Its object (in your English opinion) is anarchy and revolution. It takes the life of a bad King or a bad Minister, as if the one and the other were dangerous wild beasts to be shot at the first opportunity. I grant you this. But the laws of the Brotherhood are the laws of no other political society on the face of the earth. The members are not known to one another. There is a President in Italy; there are Presidents abroad. Each of these has his Secretary.

The Presidents and the Secretaries know the members, but the members, among themselves, are all strangers, until their Chiefs see fit, in the political necessity of the time, or in the private necessity of the Society, to make them known to each other. With such a safeguard as this, there is no oath among us on admittance. We are identified with the Brotherhood by a secret mark, which we all bear, which lasts while our lives last. We are told to go about our ordinary business, and to report ourselves to the President, or the Secretary, four times a year, in the event of our services being required. We are warned, if we betray the Brotherhood, or if we injure it by serving other interests, that we die by the principles of the Brotherhood—die by the hand of a stranger who may be sent from the other end of the world to strike the blow—or by the hand of our own bosom-friend who may have been a member unknown to us through all the years of our intimacy. Sometimes, the death is delayed; sometimes, it follows close on the treachery. It is our first business to know how to wait —our second business to know how to obey when the word is spoken. Some of us may wait our lives through, and may not be wanted. Some of us may be called to the work, or to the preparation for the work, the very day of our admission. I myself—the little, easy, cheerful man you know, who, of his own accord, would hardly lift up his handkerchief to strike down the fly that buzzes about his face—I, in my younger time, under provocation so dreadful that I will not tell you of it, entered the Brotherhood by an impulse, as I might have killed myself by an impulse. I must remain in it, now—it has got me, whatever I may think of it in my better circumstances and my cooler manhood, to my dying day. While I was still in Italy, I was chosen

Secretary; and all the members of that time, who were brought face to face with my President, were brought face to face also with *me*.'

I began to understand him; I saw the end towards which his extraordinary disclosure was now tending. He waited a moment, watching me earnestly—watching, till he had evidently guessed what was passing in my mind, before he resumed.

'You have drawn your own conclusion already,' he said. 'I see it in your face. Tell me nothing; keep me out of the secret of your thoughts. Let me make my one last sacrifice of myself, for your sake—and then have done with this subject, never to return to it again.'

He signed to me not to answer him—rose—removed his coat—and rolled up the shirt-sleeve on his left arm.

'I promised you that this confidence should be complete,' he whispered, speaking close at my ear, with his eyes looking watchfully at the door. 'Whatever comes of it, you shall not reproach me with having hidden anything from you which it was necessary to your interests to know. I have said that the Brotherhood identifies its members by a mark that lasts for life. See the place, and the mark on it for yourself.'

He raised his bare arm, and showed me, high on the upper part of it and on the inner side, a brand deeply burnt in the flesh and stained of a bright blood-red colour. I abstain from describing the device which the brand represented. It will be sufficient to say that it was circular in form, and so small that it would have been completely covered by a shilling coin.

'A man who has this mark, branded in this place,' he said, covering his arm again, 'is a member of the Brotherhood. A man who has been false to the Brotherhood is discovered sooner or later, by the

Chiefs who know him—Presidents or Secretaries, as the case may be. And a man discovered by the Chiefs is dead. *No human laws can protect him.* Remember what you have seen and heard; draw what conclusions you like; act as you please. But, in the name of God, whatever you discover, whatever you do, tell me nothing! Let me remain free from a responsibility which it horrifies me to think of—which I know, in my conscience, is not *my* responsibility, now. For the last time, I say it—on my honour as a gentleman, on my oath as a Christian, if the man you pointed out at the Opera knows *me*, he is so altered, or so disguised, that I do not know *him*. I am ignorant of his proceedings or his purposes in England—I never saw him, I never heard the name he goes by, to my knowledge, before to-night. I say no more. Leave me a little, Walter: I am overpowered by what has happened; I am shaken by what I have said. Let me try to be like myself again, when we meet next.'

He dropped into a chair; and, turning away from me, hid his face in his hands. I gently opened the door, so as not to disturb him—and spoke my few parting words in low tones, which he might hear or not, as he pleased.

'I will keep the memory of to-night in my heart of hearts,' I said. 'You shall never repent the trust you have reposed in me. May I come to you to-morrow? May I come as early as nine o'clock?'

'Yes, Walter,' he replied, looking up at me kindly, and speaking in English once more, as if his one anxiety, now, was to get back to our former relations towards each other. 'Come to my little bit of breakfast before I go my ways among the pupils that I teach.'

'Good night, Pesca.'

'Good night, my friend.'

VI.

My first conviction, as soon as I found myself outside the house, was that no alternative was left me but to act at once on the information I had received—to make sure of the Count, that night, or to risk the loss, if I only delayed till the morning, of Laura's last chance. I looked at my watch: it was ten o'clock.

Not the shadow of a doubt crossed my mind of the purpose for which the Count had left the theatre. His escape from us, that evening, was beyond all question, the preliminary only to his escape from London. The mark of the Brotherhood was on his arm—I felt as certain of it as if he had shown me the brand—and the betrayal of the Brotherhood was on his conscience—I had seen it in his recognition of Pesca.

It was easy to understand why that recognition had not been mutual. A man of the Count's character would never risk the terrible consequences of turning spy without looking to his personal security quite as carefully as he looked to his golden reward. The shaven face, which I had pointed out at the Opera, might have been covered by a beard in Pesca's time; his dark brown hair might be a wig; his name was evidently a false one. The accident of time might have helped him as well—his immense corpulence might have come with his later years. There was every reason why Pesca should not have known him again—every reason, also, why he should have known Pesca, whose singular personal appearance made a marked man of him, go where he might.

I have said that I felt certain of the purpose in the Count's mind when he escaped us at the theatre. How

could I doubt it, when I saw, with my own eyes, that he believed himself, in spite of the change in his appearance, to have been recognised by Pesca, and to be therefore in danger of his life? If I could get speech of him that night, if I could show him that I, too, knew of the mortal peril in which he stood, what result would follow? Plainly this. One of us must be master of the situation—one of us must inevitably be at the mercy of the other.

I owed it to myself to consider the chances against me, before I confronted them. I owed it to my wife to do all that lay in my power to lessen the risk.

The chances against me wanted no reckoning up: they were all merged in one. If the Count discovered, by my own avowal, that the direct way to his safety lay through my life, he was probably the last man in existence who would shrink from throwing me off my guard and taking that way, when he had me alone within his reach. The only means of defence against him on which I could at all rely to lessen the risk, presented themselves, after a little careful thinking, clearly enough. Before I made any personal acknowledgment of my discovery in his presence, I must place the discovery itself where it would be ready for instant use against him, and safe from any attempt at suppression on his part. If I laid the mine under his feet before I approached him, and if I left instructions with a third person to fire it, on the expiration of a certain time, unless directions to the contrary were previously received under my own hand, or from my own lips—in that event, the Count's security was absolutely dependent upon mine, and I might hold the vantage ground over him securely, even in his own house.

This idea occurred to me when I was close to the

new lodgings which we had taken on returning from the sea-side. I went in, without disturbing any one, by the help of my key. A light was in the hall; and I stole up with it to my workroom, to make my preparations, and absolutely to commit myself to an interview with the Count, before either Laura or Marian could have the slightest suspicion of what I intended to do.

A letter addressed to Pesca represented the surest measure of precaution which it was now possible for me to take. I wrote as follows:

'The man whom I pointed out to you at the Opera, is a member of the Brotherhood, and has been false to his trust. Put both these assertions to the test, instantly. You know the name he goes by in England. His address is No. 5, Forest Road, St. John's Wood. On the love you once bore me, use the power entrusted to you without mercy and without delay, against that man. I have risked all and lost all—and the forfeit of my failure has been paid with my life.'

I signed and dated these lines, enclosed them in an envelope, and sealed it up. On the outside, I wrote this direction: 'Keep the enclosure unopened, until nine o'clock to-morrow morning. If you do not hear from me, or see me, before that time, break the seal when the clock strikes, and read the contents.' I added my initials; and protected the whole by enclosing it in a second sealed envelope, addressed to Pesca at his lodgings.

Nothing remained to be done after this but to find the means of sending my letter to its destination immediately. I should then have accomplished all that lay in my power. If anything happened to me in the Count's house, I had now provided for his answering it with his life.

That the means of preventing his escape under any circumstances whatever, were at Pesca's disposal, if he chose to exert them, I did not for an instant doubt. The extraordinary anxiety which he had expressed to remain unenlightened as to the Count's identity—or, in other words, to be left uncertain enough about facts to justify him to his own conscience in remaining passive—betrayed plainly that the means of exercising the terrible justice of the Brotherhood were ready to his hand, although, as a naturally humane man, he had shrunk from plainly saying as much in my presence. The deadly certainty with which the vengeance of foreign political societies can hunt down a traitor to the cause, hide himself where he may, had been too often exemplified, even in my superficial experience, to allow of any doubt. Considering the subject only as a reader of newspapers, cases recurred to my memory, both in London and in Paris, of foreigners found stabbed in the streets, whose assassins could never be traced—of bodies and parts of bodies, thrown into the Thames and the Seine, by hands that could never be discovered—of deaths by secret violence which could only be accounted for in one way. I have disguised nothing relating to myself in these pages—and I do not disguise here, that I believed I had written Count Fosco's death-warrant, if the fatal emergency happened which authorised Pesca to open my enclosure.

I left my room to go down to the ground floor of the house, and speak to the landlord about finding me a messenger. He happened to be ascending the stairs at the time, and we met on the landing. His son, a quick lad, was the messenger he proposed to me, on hearing what I wanted. We had the boy upstairs; and I gave him his directions. He was to take the letter in a cab,

to put it into Professor Pesca's own hands, and to bring me back a line of acknowledgment from that gentleman; returning in the cab, and keeping it at the door for my use. It was then nearly half-past ten. I calculated that the boy might be back in twenty minutes; and that I might drive to St. John's Wood, on his return, in twenty minutes more.

When the lad had departed on his errand, I returned to my own room for a little while, to put certain papers in order, so that they might easily be found, in case of the worst. The key of the old-fashioned bureau in which the papers were kept, I sealed up, and left it on my table, with Marian's name written on the outside of the little packet. This done, I went downstairs to the sitting-room, in which I expected to find Laura and Marian awaiting my return from the Opera. I felt my hand trembling for the first time, when I laid it on the lock of the door.

No one was in the room but Marian. She was reading; and she looked at her watch, in surprise, when I came in.

'How early you are back!' she said. 'You must have come away before the opera was over.

'Yes,' I replied; 'neither Pesca nor I waited for the end.'

'Where is Laura?'

'She had one of her bad headaches this evening; and I advised her to go to bed, when we had done tea.'

I left the room again, on the pretext of wishing to see whether Laura was asleep. Marian's quick eyes were beginning to look inquiringly at my face; Marian's quick instinct was beginning to discover that I had something weighing on my mind.

When I entered the bed-chamber, and softly ap-

proached the bedside by the dim flicker of the night-lamp, my wife was asleep.

We had not been married quite a month yet. If my heart was heavy, if my resolution for a moment faltered again, when I looked at her face turned faithfully to *my* pillow in her sleep—when I saw her hand resting open on the coverlid, as if it was waiting unconsciously for mine—surely there was some excuse for me? I only allowed myself a few minutes to kneel down at the bedside, and to look close at her—so close that her breath, as it came and went, fluttered on my face. I only touched her hand and her cheek with my lips, at parting. She stirred in her sleep and murmured my name—but without waking. I lingered for an instant at the door to look at her again.

'God bless and keep you, my darling!' I whispered—and left her.

Marian was at the stair-head waiting for me. She had a folded slip of paper in her hand.

'The landlord's son has brought this for you,' she said.

'He has got a cab at the door—he says you ordered him to keep it at your disposal.'

'Quite right, Marian. I want the cab; I am going out again.'

I descended the stairs as I spoke, and looked into the sitting-room to read the slip of paper by the light on the table. It contained these two sentences, in Pesca's handwriting:—

'Your letter is received. If I don't see you before the time you mention, I will break the seal when the clock strikes.'

I placed the paper in my pocket-book, and made for the door. Marian met me on the threshold, and pushed

me back into the room where the candlelight fell full on my face. She held me by both hands, and her eyes fastened searchingly on mine.

'I see!' she said, in a low eager whisper. 'You are trying the last chance to-night.'

'Yes—the last chance and the best,' I whispered back.

'Not alone! Oh, Walter, for God's sake not alone! Let me go with you. Don't refuse me because I'm only a woman. I must go! I will go! I'll wait outside in the cab!'

It was my turn now to hold *her*. She tried to break away from me, and get down first to the door.

'If you want to help me,' I said, 'stop here, and sleep in my wife's room to-night. Only let me go away, with my mind easy about Laura, and I answer for everything else. Come, Marian, give me a kiss, and show that you have the courage to wait till I come back.'

I dared not allow her time to say a word more. She tried to hold me again. I unclasped her hands—and was out of the room in a moment. The boy below heard me on the stairs, and opened the hall-door. I jumped into the cab, before the driver could get off the box. 'Forest Road, St. John's Wood,' I called to him through the front window. 'Double fare, if you get there in a quarter of an hour.' 'I'll do it, sir.' I looked at my watch. Eleven o'clock—not a minute to lose.

The rapid motion of the cab, the sense that every instant now was bringing me nearer to the Count, the conviction that I was embarked at last, without let or hindrance, on my hazardous enterprise, heated me into such a fever of excitement that I shouted to the man to go faster and faster. As we left the streets, and crossed St. John's Wood Road, my impatience so com-

pletely overpowered me that I stood up in the cab and stretched my head out of the window, to see the end of the journey before we reached it. Just as a church clock in the distance struck the quarter past, we turned into the Forest Road. I stopped the driver a little way from the Count's house—paid and dismissed him—and walked on to the door.

As I approached the garden gate, I saw another person advancing towards it also, from the direction opposite to mine. We met under the gas lamp in the road, and looked at each other. I instantly recognised the light-haired foreigner, with the scar on his cheek; and I thought he recognised *me*. He said nothing; and, instead of stopping at the house, as I did, he slowly walked on. Was he in the Forest Road by accident? Or had he followed the Count home from the Opera?

I did not pursue those questions. After waiting a little, till the foreigner had slowly passed out of sight, I rang the gate bell. It was then twenty minutes past eleven—late enough to make it quite easy for the Count to get rid of me by the excuse that he was in bed.

The only way of providing against this contingency was to send in my name, without asking any preliminary questions, and to let him know, at the same time, that I had a serious motive for wishing to see him at that late hour. Accordingly, while I was waiting, I took out my card, and wrote under my name, 'On important business.' The maid-servant answered the door while I was writing the last word in pencil; and asked me distrustfully what I 'pleased to want.'

'Be so good as to take that to your master,' I replied, giving her the card.

I saw, by the girl's hesitation of manner, that if I had asked for the Count in the first instance, she would only

have followed her instructions by telling me he was not at home. She was staggered by the confidence with which I gave her the card. After staring at me in great perturbation, she went back into the house with my message, closing the door, and leaving me to wait in the garden.

In a minute or so, she reappeared. 'Her master's compliments, and would I be so obliging as to say what my business was?' 'Take my compliments back,' I replied; 'and say that the business cannot be mentioned to any one but your master.' She left me again —again returned—and, this time, asked me to walk in.

I followed her at once. In another moment, I was inside the Count's house.

VII.

There was no lamp in the hall; but by the dim light of the kitchen candle which the girl had brought up-stairs with her, I saw an elderly lady steal noiselessly out of a back room on the ground floor. She cast one viperish look at me as I entered the hall, but said nothing, and went slowly up-stairs, without returning my bow. My familiarity with Marian's journal sufficiently assured me that the elderly lady was Madame Fosco.

The servant led me to the room which the Countess had just left. I entered it; and found myself face to face with the Count.

He was still in his evening dress, except his coat, which he had thrown across the chair. His shirt-sleeves were turned up at the wrists—but no higher. A carpet-bag was on one side of him, and a box on the other. Books, papers, and articles of wearing apparel were scattered about the room. On a table, at one side of

the door, stood the cage, so well known to me by description, which contained his white mice. The canaries and the cockatoo were probably in some other room. He was seated before the box, packing it, when I went in, and rose with some papers in his hand to receive me. His face still betrayed plain traces of the shock that had overwhelmed him at the Opera. His fat cheeks hung loose; his cold grey eyes were furtively vigilant; his voice, look, and manner were all sharply suspicious alike, as he advanced a step to meet me, and requested, with distant civility, that I would take a chair.

'You come here on business, sir?' he said. 'I am at a loss to know what that business can possibly be.'

The unconcealed curiosity with which he looked hard in my face while he spoke, convinced me that I had passed unnoticed by him at the Opera. He had seen Pesca first; and from that moment, till he left the theatre, he had evidently seen nothing else. My name would necessarily suggest to him that I had not come into his house with other than a hostile purpose towards himself—but he appeared to be utterly ignorant, thus far, of the real nature of my errand.

'I am fortunate in finding you here to-night,' I said. 'You seem to be on the point of taking a journey?'

'Is your business connected with my journey?'

'In some degree.'

'In what degree? Do you know where I am going to?'

'No. I only know why you are leaving London.'

He slipped by me with the quickness of thought; locked the door of the room; and put the key in his pocket.

'You and I, Mr. Hartright, are excellently well acquainted with one another by reputation,' he said.

'Did it, by any chance, occur to you when you came to this house that I was not the sort of man you could trifle with?'

'It did occur to me,' I replied. 'And I have not come to trifle with you. I am here on a matter of life and death—and if that door which you have locked was open at this moment, nothing you could say or do would induce me to pass through it.'

I walked farther into the room and stood opposite to him, on the rug before the fireplace. He drew a chair in front of the door, and sat down on it, with his left arm resting on the table. The cage with the white mice was close to him; and the little creatures scampered out of their sleeping-place, as his heavy arm shook the table, and peered at him through the gaps in the smartly painted wires.

'On a matter of life and death?' he repeated to himself. 'Those words are more serious, perhaps, than you think. What do you mean?'

'What I say.'

The perspiration broke out thickly on his broad forehead. His left hand stole over the edge of the table. There was a drawer in it, with a lock, and the key was in the lock. His finger and thumb closed over the key but did not turn it.

'So you know why I am leaving London?' he went on. 'Tell me the reason, if you please.' He turned the key, and unlocked the drawer as he spoke.

'I can do better than that,' I replied; 'I can *show* you the reason, if you like.'

'How can you show it?'

'You have got your coat off,' I said. 'Roll up the shirt-sleeve on your left arm—and you will see it there.'

The same livid, leaden change passed over his face, which I had seen pass over it at the theatre. The deadly glitter in his eyes shone steady and straight into mine. He said nothing. But his left hand slowly opened the table drawer, and softly slipped into it. The harsh grating noise of something heavy that he was moving, unseen to me, sounded for a moment—then ceased. The silence that followed was so intense, that the faint ticking nibble of the white mice at their wires was distinctly audible where I stood.

My life hung by a thread—and I knew it. At that final moment, I thought with *his* mind; I felt with *his* fingers—I was as certain, as if I had seen it, of what he kept hidden from me in the drawer.

'Wait a little,' I said. 'You have got the door locked—you see I don't move—you see my hands are empty. Wait a little. I have something more to say.'

'You have said enough,' he replied, with a sudden composure, so unnatural and so ghastly that it tried my nerves as no outbreak of violence could have tried them. 'I want one moment for my own thoughts, if you please. Do you guess what I am thinking about?'

'Perhaps I do.'

'I am thinking,' he remarked quietly, 'whether I shall add to the disorder in this room, by scattering your brains about the fireplace.'

If I had moved at that moment, I saw in his face that he would have done it.

'I advise you to read two lines of writing which I have about me,' I rejoined, 'before you finally decide that question.'

The proposal appeared to excite his curiosity. He nodded his head. I took Pesca's acknowledgment of the receipt of my letter out of my pocket-book; handed

it to him at arm's length; and returned to my former position in front of the fireplace.

He read the lines aloud: '"Your letter is received. If I don't hear from you before the time you mention, I will break the seal when the clock strikes."'

Another man, in his position, would have needed some explanation of those words—the Count felt no such necessity. One reading of the note showed him the precaution that I had taken, as plainly as if he had been present at the time when I adopted it. The expression of his face changed on the instant; and his hand came out of the drawer, empty.

'I don't lock up my drawer, Mr. Hartright,' he said; 'and I don't say that I may not scatter your brains about the fireplace, yet. But I am a just man, even to my enemy—and I will acknowledge, beforehand, that they are cleverer brains than I thought them. Come to the point, sir! You want something of me?'

'I do—and I mean to have it.'

'On conditions?'

'On no conditions.'

His hand dropped into the drawer again.

'Bah! we are travelling in a circle,' he said; 'and those clever brains of yours are in danger again. Your tone is deplorably imprudent, sir—moderate it on the spot! The risk of shooting you on the place where you stand, is less to *me*, than the risk of letting you out of this house, except on conditions that I dictate and approve. You have not got my lamented friend to deal with, now—you are face to face with Fosco! If the lives of twenty Mr. Hartrights were the stepping-stones to my safety, over all those stones I would go, sustained by my sublime indifference, self-balanced by my impenetrable calm. Respect me, if you love your own

life! I summon you to answer three questions, before you open your lips again. Hear them—they are necessary to this interview. Answer them—they are necessary to ME.' He held up one finger of his right hand. 'First question!' he said. 'You come here possessed of information, which may be true, or may be false—where did you get it?'

'I decline to tell you.'

'No matter: I shall find out. If that information is true—mind I say, with the whole force of my resolution, *if*—you are making your market of it here, by treachery of your own, or by treachery of some other man. I note that circumstance, for future use, in my memory which forgets nothing, and proceed.' He held up another finger. 'Second question! Those lines you invited me to read, are without signature. Who wrote them?

'A man whom *I* have every reason to depend on; and whom *you* have every reason to fear.'

My answer reached him to some purpose. His left hand trembled audibly in the drawer.

'How long do you give me,' he asked, putting his third question in a quieter tone, 'before the clock strikes and the seal is broken?'

'Time enough for you to come to my terms,' I replied.

'Give me a plainer answer, Mr. Hartright. What hour is the clock to strike?'

'Nine, to-morrow morning.'

'Nine, to-morrow morning? Yes, yes—your trap is laid for me, before I can get my passport regulated, and leave London. It is not earlier, I suppose? We will see about that, presently—I can keep you hostage here, and bargain with you to send for your letter before I let you go. In the mean time, be so good, next, as to mention your terms.'

'You shall hear them. They are simple, and soon stated. You know whose interests I represent in coming here?'

He smiled with the most supreme composure; and carelessly waved his right hand.

'I consent to hazard a guess,' he said, jeeringly. 'A lady's interests, of course!'

'My Wife's interests.'

He looked at me with the first honest expression that had crossed his face in my presence—an expression of blank amazement. I could see that I sank in his estimation, as a dangerous man, from that moment. He shut up the drawer at once, folded his arms over his breast, and listened to me with a smile of satirical attention.

'You are well enough aware,' I went on, 'of the course which my inquiries have taken for many months past, to know that any attempted denial of plain facts will be quite useless in my presence. You are guilty of an infamous conspiracy. And the gain of a fortune of ten thousand pounds was your motive for it.'

He said nothing. But his face became overclouded suddenly by a lowering anxiety.

'Keep your gain,' I said. (His face lightened again immediately, and his eyes opened on me in wider and wider astonishment.) 'I am not here to disgrace myself by bargaining for money which has passed through your hands, and which has been the price of a vile crime——'

'Gently, Mr. Hartright. Your moral clap-traps have an excellent effect in England—keep them for yourself and your own countrymen, if you please. The ten thousand pounds was a legacy left to my excellent wife by the late Mr. Fairlie. Place the affair on those

grounds; and I will discuss it if you like. To a man of my sentiments, however, the subject is deplorably sordid. I prefer to pass it over. I invite you to resume the discussion of your terms. What do you demand?'

'In the first place, I demand a full confession of the conspiracy, written and signed in my presence, by yourself.'

He raised his finger again. 'One!' he said, checking me off with the steady attention of a practical man.

'In the second place, I demand a plain proof, which does not depend on your personal asseveration, of the date at which my wife left Blackwater Park, and travelled to London.'

'So! so! you can lay your finger, I see, on the weak place,' he remarked, composedly. 'Any more?'

'At present, no more.'

'Good! you have mentioned your terms; now listen to mine. The responsibility to myself of admitting, what you are pleased to call the "conspiracy," is less, perhaps, upon the whole, than the responsibility of laying you dead on that hearth-rug. Let us say that I meet your proposal—on my own conditions. The statement you demand of me shall be written, and the plain proof shall be produced. You call a letter from my late lamented friend, informing me of the day and hour of his wife's arrival in London, written, signed, and dated by himself, a proof, I suppose? I can give you this. I can also send you to the man of whom I hired the carriage to fetch my visitor from the railway, on the day when she arrived—his order-book may help you to your date, even if his coachman who drove me proves to be of no use. These things I can do, and will do, on conditions. I recite them. First condition! Madame Fosco and I leave this house, when and how

we please, without interference of any kind, on your part. Second condition! You wait here, in company with me, to see my agent, who is coming at seven o'clock in the morning to regulate my affairs. You give my agent a written order to the man who has got your sealed letter to resign his possession of it. You wait here till my agent places that letter unopened in my hands; and you then allow me one clear half-hour to leave the house—after which you resume your own freedom of action, and go where you please. Third condition! You give me the satisfaction of a gentleman, for your intrusion into my private affairs, and for the language you have allowed yourself to use to me, at this conference. The time and place, abroad, to be fixed in a letter from my hand when I am safe on the Continent; and that letter to contain a strip of paper measuring accurately the length of my sword. Those are *my* terms. Inform me if you accept them—Yes, or No.'

The extraordinary mixture of prompt decision, far-sighted cunning, and mountebank bravado in this speech, staggered me for a moment—and only for a moment. The one question to consider was, whether I was justified, or not, in possessing myself of the means of establishing Laura's identity, at the cost of allowing the scoundrel who had robbed her of it to escape me with impunity. I knew that the motive of securing the just recognition of my wife in the birthplace from which she had been driven out as an impostor, and of publicly erasing the lie that still profaned her mother's tombstone, was far purer, in its freedom from all taint of evil passion, than the vindictive motive which had mingled itself with my purpose from the first. And yet I cannot honestly say that my own moral

convictions were strong enough to decide the struggle in me, by themselves. They were helped by my remembrance of Sir Percival's death. How awfully, at the last moment, had the working of the retribution, *there*, been snatched from my feeble hands! What right had I to decide, in my poor mortal ignorance of the future, that this man, too, must escape with impunity, because he escaped *me?* I thought of these things—perhaps, with the superstition inherent in my nature; perhaps, with a sense worthier of me than superstition. It was hard, when I had fastened my hold on him, at last, to loosen it again of my own accord—but I forced myself to make the sacrifice. In plainer words, I determined to be guided by the one higher motive of which I was certain, the motive of serving the cause of Laura and the cause of Truth.

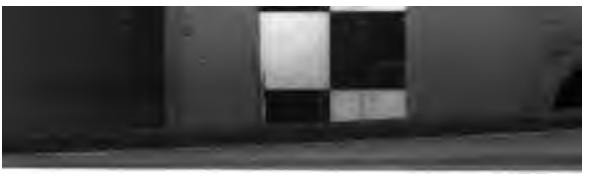
'I accept your conditions,' I said. 'With one reservation, on my part.'

'What reservation may that be?' he asked.

'It refers to the sealed letter,' I answered. 'I require you to destroy it, unopened, in my presence, as soon as it is placed in your hands.'

My object in making this stipulation was simply to prevent him from carrying away written evidence of the nature of my communication with Pesca. The *fact* of my communication he would necessarily discover, when I gave the address to his agent, in the morning. But he could make no use of it, on his own unsupported testimony—even if he really ventured to try the experiment—which need excite in me the slightest apprehension on Pesca's account.

'I grant your reservation,' he replied, after considering the question gravely for a minute or two. 'It is not



worth dispute—the letter shall be destroyed when it comes into my hands.'

He rose, as he spoke, from the chair in which he had been sitting opposite to me, up to this time. With one effort, he appeared to free his mind from the whole pressure on it of the interview between us, thus far. 'Ouf!' he cried, stretching his arms luxuriously; 'the skirmish was hot while it lasted. Take a seat, Mr. Hartright. We meet as mortal enemies hereafter—let us, like gallant gentlemen, exchange polite attentions in the mean time. Permit me to take the liberty of calling for my wife.'

He unlocked and opened the door. 'Eleanor!' he called out, in his deep voice. The lady of the viperish face came in. 'Madame Fosco—Mr. Hartright,' said the Count, introducing us with easy dignity. 'My angel,' he went on, addressing his wife; 'will your labours of packing-up allow you time to make me some nice strong coffee? I have writing-business to transact with Mr. Hartright—and I require the full possession of my intelligence to do justice to myself.'

Madame Fosco bowed her head twice—once sternly to me; once submissively to her husband—and glided out of the room.

The Count walked to a writing-table near the window; opened his desk, and took from it several quires of paper and a bundle of quill pens. He scattered the pens about the table, so that they might lie ready in all directions to be taken up when wanted, and then cut the paper into a heap of narrow slips, of the form used by professional writers for the press. 'I shall make this a remarkable document,' he said, looking at me over his shoulder. 'Habits of literary composition are perfectly familiar to me. One of the rarest of all the intel-

lectual accomplishments that a man can possess, is the grand faculty of arranging his ideas. Immense privilege! I possess it. Do you?'

He marched backwards and forwards in the room, until the coffee appeared, humming to himself, and marking the places at which obstacles occurred in the arrangement of his ideas, by striking his forehead, from time to time, with the palm of his hand. The enormous audacity with which he seized on the situation in which I had placed him, and made it the pedestal on which his vanity mounted for the one cherished purpose of self-display, mastered my astonishment by main force. Sincerely as I loathed the man, the prodigious strength of his character, even in its most trivial aspects, impressed me in spite of myself.

The coffee was brought in by Madame Fosco. He kissed her hand, in grateful acknowledgment, and escorted her to the door; returned, poured out a cup of coffee for himself, and took it to the writing-table.

'May I offer you some coffee, Mr. Hartright?' he said, before he sat down.

I declined.

'What! you think I shall poison you?' he said, gaily. 'The English intellect is sound, so far as it goes,' he continued, seating himself at the table; 'but it has one grave defect—it is always cautious in the wrong place.'

He dipped his pen in the ink; placed the first slip of paper before him, with a thump of his hand on the desk; cleared his throat; and began. He wrote with great noise and rapidity, in so large and bold a hand, and with such wide spaces between the lines, that he reached the bottom of the slip in not more than two minutes certainly from the time when he started at the top. Each slip as he finished it, was paged, and tossed

over his shoulder, out of his way, on the floor. When his first pen was worn out, *that* went over his shoulder too; and he pounced on a second from the supply scattered about the table. Slip after slip, by dozens, by fifties, by hundreds, flew over his shoulders on either side of him, till he had snowed himself up in paper all round his chair. Hour after hour passed—and there I sat watching; there he sat, writing. He never stopped, except to sip his coffee; and when that was exhausted, to smack his forehead, from time to time. One o'clock struck, two, three, four—and still the slips flew about all round him; still the untiring pen scraped its way ceaselessly from top to bottom of the page; still the white chaos of paper rose higher and higher all round his chair. At four o'clock, I heard a sudden splutter of the pen, indicative of the flourish with which he signed his name. 'Bravo!' he cried—springing to his feet with the activity of a young man, and looking me straight in the face with a smile of superb triumph.

'Done, Mr. Hartright!' he announced, with a self-renovating thump of his fist on his broad chest. 'Done, to my own profound satisfaction—to *your* profound astonishment, when you read what I have written. The subject is exahusted: the man—Fosco—is not. I proceed to the arrangement of my slips, to the revision of my slips, to the reading of my slips—addressed, emphatically, to your private ear. Four o'clock has just struck. Good! Arrangement, revision, reading, from four to five. Short snooze of restoration for myself, from five to six. Final preparations, from six to seven. Affair of agent and sealed letter, from seven to eight. At eight, *en route*. Behold the programme!'

He sat down cross-legged on the floor, among his papers; strung them together with a bodkin and a

piece of string; revised them; wrote all the titles and honours by which he was personally distinguished, at the head of the first page; and then read the manuscript to me, with loud theatrical emphasis and profuse theatrical gesticulation. The reader will have an opportunity, ere long, of forming his own opinion of the document. It will be sufficient to mention here that it answered my purpose.

He next wrote me the address of the person from whom he had hired the fly, and handed me Sir Percival's letter. It was dated from Hampshire on the 25th of July; and it announced the journey of 'Lady Glyde' to London, on the 26th. Thus, on the very day (the 25th), when the doctor's certificate declared that she had died in St. John's Wood, she was alive, by Sir Percival's own showing, at Blackwater—and, on the day after, she was to take a journey! When the proof of that journey was obtained from the flyman, the evidence would be complete.

'A quarter past five,' said the Count, looking at his watch. 'Time for my restorative snooze. I personally resemble Napoleon the Great, as you may have remarked, Mr. Hartright—I also resemble that immortal man in my power of commanding sleep at will. Excuse me, one moment. I will summon Madame Fosco, to keep you from feeling dull.'

Knowing as well as he did, that he was summoning Madame Fosco, to ensure my not leaving the house while he was asleep, I made no reply, and occupied myself in tying up the papers which he had placed in my possession.

The lady came in, cool, pale, and venomous as ever. 'Amuse Mr. Hartright, my angel,' said the Count. He placed a chair for her, kissed her hand for the second

Then read the manuscript to me, with loud theatrical emphasis and profuse theatrical gesticulation.

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time, withdrew to a sofa, and, in three minutes, was as peacefully and happily asleep as the most virtuous man in existence.

Madame Fosco took a book from the table—sat down—and looked at me, with the steady, vindictive malice of a woman who never forgot and never forgave.

'I have been listening to your conversation with my husband,' she said. 'If I had been in *his* place—*I* would have laid you dead on the hearth-rug.'

With those words, she opened her book; and never looked at me, or spoke to me, from that time till the time when her husband woke.

He opened his eyes and rose from the sofa, accurately to an hour from the time when he had gone to sleep.

'I feel infinitely refreshed,' he remarked. 'Eleanor, my good wife, are you all ready, up-stairs? That is well. My little packing here can be completed in ten minutes—my travelling-dress assumed in ten minutes more. What remains, before the agent comes?' He looked about the room, and noticed the cage with his white mice in it. 'Ah!' he cried piteously; 'a last laceration of my sympathies still remains. My innocent pets! my little cherished children! what am I to do with them? For the present, we are settled nowhere; for the present, we travel incessantly—the less baggage we carry, the better for ourselves. My cockatoo, my canaries, and my little mice—who will cherish them, when their good Papa is gone?'

He walked about the room, deep in thought. He had not been at all troubled about writing his confession, but he was visibly perplexed and distressed about the far more important question of the disposal of his pets. After long consideration, he suddenly sat down again at the writing-table.

'An idea!' he exclaimed. 'I will offer my canaries and my cockatoo to this vast Metropolis—my agent shall present them, in my name, to the Zoological Gardens of London. The Document that describes them shall be drawn out on the spot.'

He began to write, repeating the words as they flowed from his pen.

'Number One. Cockatoo of transcendent plumage: attraction, of himself, to all visitors of taste. Number Two. Canaries of unrivalled vivacity and intelligence: worthy of the garden of Eden, worthy also of the garden in the Regent's Park. Homage to British Zoology. Offered by Fosco.'

The pen spluttered again; and the flourish was attached to his signature.

'Count! you have not included the mice,' said Madame Fosco.

He left the table, took her hand, and placed it on his heart.

'All human resolution, Eleanor,' he said, solemnly, 'has its limits. My limits are inscribed on that Document. I cannot part with my white mice. Bear with me, my angel, and remove them to their travelling-cage up-stairs.'

'Admirable tenderness!' said Madame Fosco, admiring her husband, with a last viperish look in my direction. She took up the cage carefully; and left the room.

The Count looked at his watch. In spite of his resolute assumption of composure, he was getting anxious for the agent's arrival. The candles had long since been extinguished; and the sunlight of the new morning poured into the room. It was not till five minutes past seven that the gate bell rang, and the

agent made his appearance. He was a foreigner with a dark bead.

'Mr. Hartright—Monsieur Rubelle,' said the Count, introducing us. He took the agent (a foreign spy, in every line of his face, if ever there was one yet) into a corner of the room; whispered some directions to him; and then left us together. 'Monsieur Rubelle,' as soon as we were alone, suggested, with great politeness, that I should favour him with his instructions. I wrote two lines to Pesca, authorising him to deliver my sealed letter 'to the Bearer;' directed the note; and handed it to Monsieur Rubelle.

The agent waited with me till his employer returned, equipped in travelling costume. The Count examined the address of my letter before he dismissed the agent. 'I thought so!' he said, turning on me with a dark look, and altering again in his manner from that moment.

He completed his packing; and then sat consulting a travelling map, making entries in his pocket-book, and looking, every now and then, impatiently at his watch. Not another word, addressed to myself, passed his lips. The near approach of the hour for his departure, and the proof he had seen of the communication established between Pesca and myself, had plainly recalled his whole attention to the measures that were necessary for securing his escape.

A little before eight o'clock, Monsieur Rubelle came back with my unopened letter in his hand. The Count looked carefully at the superscription and the seal—lit a candle—and burnt the letter. 'I perform my promise,' he said; 'but this matter, Mr. Hartright, shall not end here.'

The agent had kept at the door the cab in which he

had returned. He and the maid-servant now busied themselves in removing the luggage. Madame Fosco came down-stairs, thickly veiled, with the travelling-cage of the white mice in her hand. She neither spoke to me, nor looked towards me. Her husband escorted her to the cab. 'Follow me, as far as the passage,' he whispered in my ear; 'I may want to speak to you at the last moment.'

I went out to the door; the agent standing below me in the front garden. The Count came back alone, and drew me a few steps inside the passage.

'Remember the Third condition!' he whispered. 'You shall hear from me, Mr. Hartright—I may claim from you the satisfaction of a gentleman sooner than you think for.' He caught my hand, before I was aware of him, and wrung it hard—then turned to the door, stopped, and came back to me again.

'One word more,' he said, confidentially. 'When I last saw Miss Halcombe, she looked thin and ill. I am anxious about that admirable woman. Take care of her, sir! With my hand on my heart, I solemnly implore you—take care of Miss Halcombe!'

Those were the last words he said to me before he squeezed his huge body into the cab, and drove off.

The agent and I waited at the door a few moments, looking after him. While we were standing together, a second cab appeared from a turning a little way down the road. It followed the direction previously taken by the Count's cab; and, as it passed the house and the open garden gate, a person inside looked at us out of the window. The stranger at the Opera again!—the foreigner with the scar on his left cheek.

'You wait here with me, sir, for half an hour more!' said Monsieur Rubelle.

'I do.'

We returned to the sitting-room. I was in no humour to speak to the agent, or to allow him to speak to me. I took out the papers which the Count had placed in my hands; and read the terrible story of the conspiracy told by the man who had planned and perpetrated it.

The Story continued by ISIDOR OTTAVIO BALDASSARE FOSCO; *Count of the Holy Roman Empire; Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Brazen Crown; Perpetual Arch-Master of the Rosicrucian Masons of Mesopotamia; Attached (in Honorary Capacities) to Societies Musical, Societies Medical, Societies Philosophical, and Societies General Benevolent, throughout Europe;* &c., &c., &c.

The COUNT'S *Narrative.*

In the summer of eighteen hundred and fifty, I arrived in England, charged with a delicate political mission from abroad. Confidential persons were semi-officially connected with me, whose exertions I was authorized to direct—Monsieur and Madame Rubelle being among the number. Some weeks of spare time were at my disposal, before I entered on my functions by establishing myself in the suburbs of London. Curiosity may stop here, to ask for some explanation of those functions on my part. I entirely sympathize with the request. I also regret that diplomatic reserve forbids me to comply with it.

I arranged to pass the preliminary period of repose, to which I have just referred, in the superb mansion of my late lamented friend, Sir Percival Glyde. *He* arrived from the Continent with *his* wife. *I* arrived from the Continent with *mine*. England is the land of domestic happiness—how appropriately we entered it under these domestic circumstances!

The bond of friendship which united Percival and myself, was strengthened, on this occasion, by a touching similarity in the pecuniary position, on his side and on mine. We both wanted money. Immense necessity! Universal want! Is there a civilised human being who does not feel for us? How insensible must that man be! Or how rich!

I enter into no sordid particulars, in discussing this part of the subject. My mind recoils from them. With a Roman austerity, I show my empty purse and Percival's to the shrinking public gaze. Let us allow the deplorable fact to assert itself, once for all, in that manner—and pass on.

We were received at the mansion by the magnificent creature who is inscribed on my heart as 'Marian'—who is known in the colder atmosphere of Society, as 'Miss Halcombe.'

Just Heaven! with what inconceivable rapidity I learnt to adore that woman. At sixty, I worshipped her with the volcanic ardour of eighteen. All the gold of my rich nature was poured hopelessly at her feet. My wife—poor angel!—my wife who adores me, got nothing but the shillings and the pennies. Such is the World; such Man; such Love. What are we (I ask) but puppets in a show-box? Oh, omnipotent Destiny, pull our strings gently! Dance us mercifully off our miserable little stage!

The preceding lines, rightly understood, express an entire system of philosophy. It is Mine.

I resume.

The domestic position at the commencement of our residence at Blackwater Park has been drawn with amazing accuracy, with profound mental insight, by the hand of Marian herself. (Pass me the intoxicating familiarity of mentioning this sublime creature by her Christian name.) Accurate knowledge of the contents of her journal—to which I obtained access by clandestine means, unspeakably precious to me in the remembrance—warns my eager pen from topics which this essentially exhaustive woman has already made her own.

The interests—interests, breathless and immense!—with which I am here concerned, begin with the deplorable calamity of Marian's illness.

The situation, at this period, was emphatically a serious one. Large sums of money, due at a certain time, were wanted by Percival (I say nothing of the modicum equally necessary to myself); and the one source to look to for supplying them was the fortune of his wife, of which not one farthing was at his disposal until her death. Bad, so far; and worse still farther on. My lamented friend had private troubles of his own, into which the delicacy of my disinterested attachment to him forbade me from inquiring too curiously. I knew nothing but that a woman, named Anne Catherick, was hidden in the neighbourhood; that she was in communication with Lady Glyde; and that the disclosure of a secret, which would be the certain ruin of Percival, might be the result. He had told me himself that he was a lost man, unless his wife was silenced,

and unless Anne Catherick was found. If he was a lost man, what would become of our pecuniary interests? Courageous as I am by nature, I absolutely trembled at the idea!

The whole force of my intelligence was now directed to the finding of Anne Catherick. Our money affairs, important as they were, admitted of delay—but the necessity of discovering the woman admitted of none. I only knew her, by description, as presenting an extraordinary personal resemblance to Lady Glyde. The statement of this curious fact—intended merely to assist me in identifying the person of whom we were in search—when coupled with the additional information that Anne Catherick had escaped from a madhouse, started the first immense conception in my mind, which subsequently led to such amazing results. That conception involved nothing less than the complete transformation of two separate identities. Lady Glyde and Anne Catherick were to change names, places, and destinies, the one with the other—the prodigious consequences contemplated by the change, being the gain of thirty thousand pounds, and the eternal preservation of Sir Percival's secret.

My instincts (which seldom err) suggested to me, on reviewing the circumstances, that our invisible Anne would, sooner or later, return to the boat-house at the Blackwater lake. There I posted myself; previously mentioning to Mrs. Michelson, the housekeeper, that I might be found when wanted, immersed in study, in that solitary place. It is my rule never to make unnecessary mysteries, and never to set people suspecting me for want of a little seasonable candour, on my part. Mrs. Michelson believed in me from first to last. This ladylike person (widow of a Protestant Priest) over-

flowed with faith. Touched by such superfluity of simple confidence, in a woman of her mature years, I opened the ample reservoirs of my nature, and absorbed it all.

I was rewarded for posting myself sentinel at the lake, by the appearance—not of Anne Catherick herself, but of the person in charge of her. This individual also overflowed with simple faith, which I absorbed in myself, as in the case already mentioned. I leave her to describe the circumstances (if she has not done so already) under which she introduced me to the object of her maternal care. When I first saw Anne Catherick, she was asleep. I was electrified by the likeness between this unhappy woman and Lady Glyde. The details of the grand scheme, which had suggested themselves in outline only, up to that period, occurred to me, in all their masterly combination, at the sight of the sleeping face. At the same time, my heart, always accessible to tender influences, dissolved in tears at the spectacle of suffering before me. I instantly set myself to impart relief. In other words, I provided the necessary stimulant for strengthening Anne Catherick to perform the journey to London.

At this point, I enter a necessary protest, and correct a lamentable error.

The best years of my life have been passed in the ardent study of medical and chemical science. Chemistry, especially, has always had irresistible attractions for me, from the enormous, the illimitable power which the knowledge of it confers. Chemists, I assert it emphatically, might sway, if they pleased, the destinies of humanity. Let me explain this before I go further.

Mind, they say, rules the world. But what rules the

mind? The body. The body (follow me closely here) lies at the mercy of the most omnipotent of all potentates—the Chemist. Give me—Fosco—chemistry; and when Shakespeare has conceived Hamlet, and sits down to execute the conception—with a few grains of powder dropped into his daily food, I will reduce his mind, by the action of his body, till his pen pours out the most abject drivel that has ever degraded paper. Under similar circumstances, revive me the illustrious Newton. I guarantee that, when he sees the apple fall, he shall *eat* it, instead of discovering the principle of gravitation. Nero's dinner shall transform Nero into the mildest of men, before he has done digesting it; and the morning draught of Alexander the Great shall make Alexander run for his life, at the first sight of the enemy, the same afternoon. On my sacred word of honour, it is lucky for society that modern chemists are, by incomprehensible good fortune, the most harmless of mankind. The mass are worthy fathers of families, who keep shops. The few are philosophers besotted with admiration for the sound of their own lecturing voices; visionaries who waste their lives on fantastic impossibilities; or quacks whose ambition soars no higher than our corns. Thus Society escapes; and the illimitable power of Chemistry remains the slave of the most superficial and the most insignificant ends.

Why this outburst? Why this withering eloquence?

Because my conduct has been misrepresented; because my motives have been misunderstood. It has been assumed that I used my vast chemical resources against Anne Catherick; and that I would have used them, if I could, against the magnificent Marian herself. Odious insinuations both! All my interests were concerned (as will be seen presently) in the preservation

of Anne Catherick's life. All my anxieties were concentrated on Marian's rescue from the hands of the licensed Imbecile who attended her, and who found my advice confirmed, from first to last, by the physician from London. On two occasions only—both equally harmless to the individual on whom I practised—did I summon to myself the assistance of chemical knowledge. On the first of the two, after following Marian to the inn at Blackwater (studying, behind a convenient waggon which hid me from her, the poetry of motion, as embodied in her walk), I availed myself of the services of my invaluable wife, to copy one and to intercept the other of two letters which my adored enemy had entrusted to a discarded maid. In this case, the letters being in the bosom of the girl's dress, Madame Fosco could only open them, read them, perform her instructions, seal them, and put them back again, by scientific assistance—which assistance I rendered in a half-ounce bottle. The second occasion when the same means were employed, was the occasion (to which I shall soon refer) of Lady Glyde's arrival in London. Never, at any other time, was I indebted to my Art, as distinguished from myself. To all other emergencies and complications my natural capacity for grappling, single-handed, with circumstances, was invariably equal. I affirm the all-pervading intelligence of that capacity. At the expense of the Chemist, I vindicate the Man.

Respect this outburst of generous indignation. It has inexpressibly relieved me. *En route!* Let us proceed.

Having suggested to Mrs. Clement (or Clements, I am not sure which) that the best method of keeping

Anne out of Percival's reach was to remove her to London; having found that my proposal was eagerly received; and having appointed a day to meet the travellers at the station, and to see them leave it—I was at liberty to return to the house, and to confront the difficulties which still remained to be met.

My first proceeding was to avail myself of the sublime devotion of my wife. I had arranged with Mrs. Clements that she should communicate her London address, in Anne's interests, to Lady Glyde. But this was not enough. Designing persons, in my absence, might shake the simple confidence of Mrs. Clements, and she might not write, after all. Who could I find capable of travelling to London by the train she travelled by, and of privately seeing her home? I asked myself this question. The conjugal part of me immediately answered—Madame Fosco.

After deciding on my wife's mission to London, I arranged that the journey should serve a double purpose. A nurse for the suffering Marian, equally devoted to the patient and to myself, was a necessity of my position. One of the most eminently confidential and capable women in existence was by good fortune at my disposal. I refer to that respectable matron, Madame Rubelle—to whom I addressed a letter, at her residence in London, by the hands of my wife.

On the appointed day Mrs. Clements and Anne Catherick met me at the station. I politely saw them off. I politely saw Madame Fosco off by the same train. The last thing at night, my wife returned to Blackwater, having followed her instructions with the most unimpeachable accuracy. She was accompanied by Madame Rubelle; and she brought me the London address of Mrs. Clements. After-events proved this

last precaution to have been unnecessary. Mrs. Clements punctually informed Lady Glyde of her place of abode. With a wary eye on future emergencies, I kept the letter.

The same day, I had a brief interview with the doctor, at which I protested, in the sacred interests of humanity, against his treatment of Marian's case. He was insolent, as all ignorant people are. I showed no resentment; I deferred quarrelling with him till it was necessary to quarrel to some purpose.

My next proceeding was to leave Blackwater myself. I had my London residence to take, in anticipation of coming events. I had also a little business, of the domestic sort, to transact with Mr. Frederick Fairlie. I found the house I wanted, in St. John's Wood. I found Mr. Fairlie, at Limmeridge, Cumberland.

My own private familiarity with the nature of Marian's correspondence had previously informed me that she had written to Mr. Fairlie, proposing as a relief to Lady Glyde's matrimonial embarrassments, to take her on a visit to her uncle in Cumberland. This letter I had wisely allowed to reach its destination; feeling, at the time, that it could do no harm, and might do good. I now presented myself before Mr. Fairlie, to support Marian's own proposal—with certain modifications which, happily for the success of my plans, were rendered really inevitable by her illness. It was necessary that Lady Glyde should leave Blackwater alone, by her uncle's invitation, and that she should rest a night on the journey, at her aunt's house (the house I had in St. John's Wood), by her uncle's express advice. To achieve these results, and to secure a note of invitation which could be shown to Lady Glyde, were the objects of my visit to Mr. Fairlie. When I have mentioned

that this gentleman was equally feeble in mind and body, and that I let loose the whole force of my character on him, I have said enough. I came, saw, and conquered Fairlie.

On my return to Blackwater Park (with the letter of invitation) I found that the doctor's imbecile treatment of Marian's case had led to the most alarming results. The fever had turned to Typhus. Lady Glyde, on the day of my return, tried to force herself into the room to nurse her sister. She and I had no affinities of sympathy; she had committed the unpardonable outrage on my sensibilities of calling me a Spy; she was a stumbling-block in my way and in Percival's—but, for all that, my magnanimity forbade me to put her in danger of infection with my own hand. At the same time, I offered no hindrance to her putting herself in danger. If she had succeeded in doing so, the intricate knot which I was slowly and patiently operating on, might perhaps have been cut, by circumstances. As it was, the doctor interfered, and she was kept out of the room.

I had myself previously recommended sending for advice to London. This course had been now taken. The physician, on his arrival, confirmed my view of the case. The crisis was serious. But we had hope of our charming patient on the fifth day from the appearance of the Typhus. I was only once absent from Blackwater at this time—when I went to London by the morning train, to make the final arrangements at my house in St. John's Wood; to assure myself, by private inquiry, that Mrs. Clements had not moved; and to settle one or two little preliminary matters with the husband of Madame Rubelle. I returned at night. Five days afterwards, the physician pronounced our interesting Marian to be out of all danger, and to be in

need of nothing but careful nursing. This was the time I had waited for. Now that medical attendance was no longer indispensable, I played the first move in the game by asserting myself against the doctor. He was one among many witnesses in my way, whom it was necessary to remove. A lively altercation between us (in which Percival, previously instructed by me, refused to interfere) served the purpose in view. I descended on the miserable man in an irresistible avalanche of indignation—and swept him from the house.

The servants were the next encumbrances to get rid of. Again I instructed Percival (whose moral courage required perpetual stimulants), and Mrs. Michelson was amazed, one day, by hearing from her master that the establishment was to be broken up. We cleared the house of all the servants but one, who was kept for domestic purposes, and whose lumpish stupidity we could trust to make no embarrassing discoveries. When they were gone, nothing remained but to relieve ourselves of Mrs. Michelson—a result which was easily achieved by sending this amiable lady to find lodgings for her mistress at the sea-side.

The circumstances were now—exactly what they were required to be. Lady Glyde was confined to her room by nervous illness; and the lumpish housemaid (I forget her name) was shut up there, at night, in attendance on her mistress. Marian, though fast recovering, still kept her bed, with Mrs. Rubelle for nurse. No other living creatures but my wife, myself, and Percival, were in the house. With all the chances thus in our favour, I confronted the next emergency, and played the second move in the game.

The object of the second move was to induce Lady Glyde to leave Blackwater, unaccompanied by her sis-

ter. Unless we could persuade her that Marian had gone on to Cumberland first, there was no chance of removing her, of her own free will, from the house. To produce this necessary operation in her mind, we concealed our interesting invalid in one of the uninhabited bedrooms at Blackwater. At the dead of night, Madame Fosco, Madame Rubelle, and myself (Percival not being cool enough to be trusted), accomplished the concealment. The scene was picturesque, mysterious, dramatic, in the highest degree. By my directions, the bed had been made, in the morning, on a strong movable framework of wood. We had only to lift the framework gently at the head and foot, and to transport our patient where we pleased, without disturbing herself or her bed. No chemical assistance was needed, or used, in this case. Our interesting Marian lay in the deep repose of convalescence. We placed the candles and opened the doors, beforehand. I, in right of my great personal strength, took the head of the framework—my wife and Madame Rubelle took the foot. I bore my share of that inestimably precious burden with a manly tenderness, with a fatherly care. Where is the modern Rembrandt who could depict our midnight procession? Alas for the Arts! alas for this most pictorial of subjects! the modern Rembrandt is nowhere to be found.

The next morning, my wife and I started for London —leaving Marian secluded, in the uninhabited middle of the house, under care of Madame Rubelle; who kindly consented to imprison herself with her patient for two or three days. Before taking our departure, I gave Percival Mr. Fairlie's letter of invitation to his niece (instructing her to sleep on the journey to Cumberland at her aunt's house), with directions to show

it to Lady Glyde on hearing from me. I also obtained from him the address of the Asylum in which Anne Catherick had been confined, and a letter to the proprietor, announcing to that gentleman the return of his runaway patient to medical care.

I had arranged, at my last visit to the metropolis, to have our modest domestic establishment ready to receive us when we arrived in London by the early train. In consequence of this wise precaution, we were enabled that same day to play the third move in the game—the getting possession of Anne Catherick.

Dates are of importance here. I combine in myself the opposite characteristics of a Man of Sentiment and a Man of Business. I have all the dates at my fingers' ends.

On Wednesday, the 24th of July, 1850, I sent my wife, in a cab, to clear Mrs. Clements out of the way, in the first place. A supposed message from Lady Glyde in London, was sufficient to obtain this result. Mrs. Clements was taken away in the cab, and was left in the cab, while my wife (on pretence of purchasing something at a shop) gave her the slip, and returned to receive her expected visitor at our house in St. John's Wood. It is hardly necessary to add that the visitor had been described to the servants as 'Lady Glyde.'

In the meanwhile I had followed in another cab, with a note for Anne Catherick, merely mentioning that Lady Glyde intended to keep Mrs. Clements to spend the day with her, and that she was to join them, under care of the good gentleman waiting outside, who had already saved her from discovery in Hampshire by Sir Percival. The 'good gentleman' sent in this note by a street boy, and paused for results, a door or two farther on. At the moment when Anne appeared at the house-door and closed it, this excellent man had the

cab-door open ready for her—absorbed her into the vehicle—and drove off.

(Pass me, here, one exclamation in parenthesis. How interesting this is!)

On the way to Forest Road, my companion showed no fear. I can be paternal—no man more so—when I please; and I was intensely paternal on this occasion. What titles I had to her confidence! I had compounded the medicine which had done her good; I had warned her of her danger from Sir Percival. Perhaps, I trusted too implicitly to these titles; perhaps, I underrated the keenness of the lower instincts in persons of weak intellect—it is certain that I neglected to prepare her sufficiently for a disappointment on entering my house. When I took her into the drawing-room—when she saw no one present but Madame Fosco, who was a stranger to her—she exhibited the most violent agitation: if she had scented danger in the air, as a dog scents the presence of some creature unseen, her alarm could not have displayed itself more suddenly and more causelessly. I interposed in vain. The fear from which she was suffering, I might have soothed—but the serious heart disease, under which she laboured, was beyond the reach of all moral palliatives. To my unspeakable horror, she was seized with convulsions—a shock to the system, in her condition, which might have laid her dead at any moment, at our feet.

The nearest doctor was sent for, and was told that 'Lady Glyde' required his immediate services. To my infinite relief, he was a capable man. I represented my visitor to him as a person of weak intellect, and subject to delusions; and I arranged that no nurse but my wife should watch in the sick-room. The unhappy woman was too ill, however, to cause any anxiety about what

she might say. The one dread which now oppressed me, was the dread that the false Lady Glyde might die, before the true Lady Glyde arrived in London.

I had written a note in the morning to Madame Rubelle, telling her to join me, at her husband's house, on the evening of Friday, the 26th; with another note to Percival, warning him to show his wife her uncle's letter of invitation, to assert that Marian had gone on before her, and to despatch her to town, by the mid-day train, on the 26th, also. On reflection, I had felt the necessity, in Anne Catherick's state of health, of precipitating events, and of having Lady Glyde at my disposal earlier than I had originally contemplated. What fresh directions, in the terrible uncertainty of my position, could I now issue? I could do nothing but trust to chance and the doctor. My emotions expressed themselves in pathetic apostrophes—which I was just self-possessed enough to couple, in the hearing of other people, with the name of 'Lady Glyde.' In all other respects, Fosco, on that memorable day, was Fosco shrouded in total eclipse.

She passed a bad night—she awoke worn out—but, later in the day, she revived amazingly. My elastic spirits revived with her. I could receive no answers from Percival and Madame Rubelle till the morning of the next day—the 26th. In anticipation of their following my directions, which, accident apart, I knew they would do, I went to secure a fly to fetch Lady Glyde from the railway; directing it to be at my house on the 26th, at two o'clock. After seeing the order entered in the book, I went on to arrange matters with Monsieur Rubelle. I also procured the services of two gentlemen, who could furnish me with the necessary certificates of lunacy. One of them I knew personally: the

other was known to Monsieur Rubelle. Both were men whose vigorous minds soared superior to narrow scruples, both were labouring under temporary embarrassments—both believed in ME.

It was past five o'clock in the afternoon before I returned from the performance of these duties. When I got back, Anne Catherick was dead. Dead on the 25th; and Lady Glyde was not to arrive in London till the 26th!

I was stunned. Meditate on that. Fosco stunned!

It was too late to retrace our steps. Before my return, the doctor had officiously undertaken to save me all trouble, by registering the death on the date when it happened, with his own hand. My grand scheme, unassailable hitherto, had its weak place now—no efforts, on my part, could alter the fatal event of the 25th. I turned manfully to the future. Percival's interests and mine being still at stake, nothing was left but to play the game through to the end. I recalled my impenetrable calm—and played it.

On the morning of the 26th, Percival's letter reached me, announcing his wife's arrival by the mid-day train. Madame Rubelle also wrote to say she would follow in the evening. I started in the fly, leaving the false Lady Glyde dead in the house, to receive the true Lady Glyde, on her arrival by the railway at three o'clock. Hidden under the seat of the carriage, I carried with me all the clothes Anne Catherick had worn on coming into my house—they were destined to assist the resurrection of the woman who was dead in the person of the woman who was living. What a situation! I suggest it to the rising romance writers of England. I offer it, as totally new, to the worn-out dramatists of France.

Lady Glyde was at the station. There was great

crowding and confusion, and more delay than I liked (in case any of her friends had happened to be on the spot), in reclaiming her luggage. Her first questions, as we drove off, implored me to tell her news of her sister. I invented news of the most pacifying kind; assuring her that she was about to see her sister at my house. My house, on this occasion only, was in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, and was in the occupation of Monsieur Rubelle, who received us in the hall.

I took my visitor upstairs into a back room; the two medical gentlemen being there in waiting on the floor beneath, to see the patient, and to give me their certificates. After quieting Lady Glyde by the necessary assurances about her sister, I introduced my friends, separately, to her presence. They performed the formalities of the occasion, briefly, intelligently, conscientiously. I entered the room again, as soon as they had left it; and at once precipitated events by a reference, of the alarming kind, to 'Miss Halcombe's' state of health.

Results followed as I had anticipated. Lady Glyde became frightened, and turned faint. For the second time, and the last, I called Science to my assistance. A medicated glass of water, and a medicated bottle of smelling-salts, relieved her of all further embarrassment and alarm. Additional applications, later in the evening, procured her the inestimable blessing of a good night's rest. Madame Rubelle arrived in time to preside at Lady Glyde's toilet. Her own clothes were taken away from her at night, and Anne Catherick's were put on her in the morning, with the strictest regard to propriety, by the matronly hands of the good Rubelle. Throughout the day, I kept our patient in a

state of partially-suspended consciousness, until the dexterous assistance of my medical friends enabled me to procure the necessary order, rather earlier than I had ventured to hope. That evening (the evening of the 27th) Madame Rubelle and I took our revived 'Anne Catherick' to the Asylum. She was received, with great surprise—but without suspicion; thanks to the order and certificates, to Percival's letter, to the likeness, to the clothes, and to the patient's own confused mental condition at the time. I returned at once to assist Madame Fosco in the preparations for the burial of the false 'Lady Glyde,' having the clothes and luggage of the true 'Lady Glyde' in my possession. They were afterwards sent to Cumberland by the conveyance which was used for the funeral. I attended the funeral, with becoming dignity, attired in the deepest mourning.

My narrative of these remarkable events, written under equally remarkable circumstances, closes here. The minor precautions which I observed in communicating with Limmeridge House, are already known—so is the magnificent success of my enterprise—so are the solid pecuniary results which followed it. I have to assert, with the whole force of my conviction, that the one weak place in my scheme would never have been found out, if the one weak place in my heart had not been discovered first. Nothing but my fatal admiration for Marian restrained me from stepping in to my own rescue, when she effected her sister's escape. I ran the risk, and trusted in the complete destruction of Lady Glyde's identity. If either Marian or Mr. Hartright attempted to assert that identity, they would publicly expose themselves to the imputation of sustaining a rank deception; they would be distrusted and discred-

ited accordingly; and they would, therefore, be powerless to place my interests, or Percival's secret, in jeopardy. I committed one error in trusting myself to such a blindfold calculation of chances as this. I committed another when Percival had paid the penalty of his own obstinacy and violence, by granting Lady Glyde a second reprieve from the madhouse, and allowing Mr. Hartright a second chance of escaping me. In brief, Fosco, at this serious crisis, was untrue to himself. Deplorable and uncharacteristic fault! Behold the cause, in my Heart—behold, in the image of Marian Halcombe, the first and last weakness of Fosco's life!

At the ripe age of sixty, I make this unparalleled confession. Youths! I invoke your sympathy. Maidens! I claim your tears.

A word more—and the attention of the reader (concentrated breathlessly on myself) shall be released.

My own mental insight informs me that three inevitable questions will be asked, here, by persons of inquiring minds. They shall be stated: they shall be answered.

First question. What is the secret of Madame Fosco's unhesitating devotion of herself to the fulfilment of my boldest wishes, to the furtherance of my deepest plans? I might answer this, by simply referring to my own character, and by asking, in my turn:—Where, in the history of the world, has a man of my order ever been found without a woman in the background, self-immolated on the altar of his life? But, I remember that I am writing in England; I remember that I was married in England—and I ask, if a woman's marriage obligations, in this country, provide for her private opinion of her husband's principles? No!

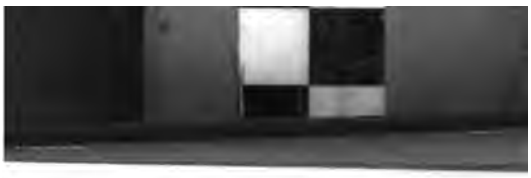
They charge her unreservedly to love, honour, and obey him. That is exactly what my wife has done. I stand, here, on a supreme moral elevation; and I loftily assert her accurate performance of her conjugal duties. Silence, Calumny! Your sympathy, Wives of England, for Madame Fosco.

Second question. If Anne Catherick had not died when she did, what should I have done? I should, in that case, have assisted worn-out Nature in finding permanent repose. I should have opened the doors of the Prison of Life, and have extended to the captive (incurably afflicted in mind and body both) a happy release.

Third question. On a calm revision of all the circumstances—Is my conduct worthy of any serious blame? Most emphatically, No! Have I not carefully avoided exposing myself to the odium of committing unnecessary crime? With my vast resources in chemistry, I might have taken Lady Glyde's life. At immense personal sacrifice, I followed the dictates of my own ingenuity, my own humanity, my own caution—and took her identity, instead. Judge me by what I might have done. How comparatively innocent! how indirectly virtuous I appear, in what I really did!

I announced, on beginning it, that this narrative would be a remarkable document. It has entirely answered my expectations. Receive these fervid lines —my last legacy to the country I leave for ever. They are worthy of the occasion, and worthy of

FOSCO.



The Story concluded by WALTER HARTRIGHT.

I.

When I closed the last leaf of the Count's manuscript, the half-hour during which I had engaged to remain at Forest Road had expired. Monsieur Rubelle looked at his watch, and bowed. I rose immediately, and left the agent in possession of the empty house. I never saw him again; I never heard more of him or of his wife. Out of the dark byways of villany and deceit, they had crawled across our path—into the same byways they crawled back secretly and were lost.

In a quarter of an hour after leaving Forest Road, I was at home again.

But few words sufficed to tell Laura and Marian how my desperate venture had ended, and what the next event in our lives was likely to be. I left all details to be described later in the day; and hastened back to St. John's Wood, to see the person of whom Count Fosco had ordered the fly when he went to meet Laura at the station.

The address in my possession led me to some 'livery stables,' about a quarter of a mile distant from Forest Road. The proprietor proved to be a civil and respectable man. When I explained that an important family matter obliged me to ask him to refer to his books, for the purpose of ascertaining a date with which the record of his business transactions might supply me, he offered no objection to granting my request. The book was produced; and there, under the date of 'July 26th, 1850,' the order was entered, in these words:

'Brougham to Count Fosco, 5, Forest Road. Two o'clock. (John Owen.)'

I found, on inquiry, that the name of 'John Owen,' attached to the entry, referred to the man who had been employed to drive the fly. He was then at work in the stableyard, and was sent for to see me, at my request.

'Do you remember driving a gentleman, in the month of July last, from Number Five, Forest Road, to the Waterloo Bridge station?' I asked.

'Well, sir,' said the man; 'I can't exactly say I do.'

'Perhaps you remember the gentleman himself? Can you call to mind driving a foreigner, last summer —a tall gentleman, and remarkably fat?'

The man's face brightened directly. 'I remember him, sir! The fattest gentleman as ever I see—and the heaviest customer as ever I drove. Yes, yes—I call him to mind, sir. We *did* go to the station, and it was from Forest Road. There was a parrot, or summat like it, screeching in the window. The gentleman was in a mortal hurry about the lady's luggage; and he give me a handsome present for looking sharp and getting the boxes.'

Getting the boxes! I recollected immediately that Laura's own account of herself, on her arrival in London, described her luggage as being collected for her by some person whom Count Fosco brought with him to the station. This was the man.

'Did you see the lady?' I asked. 'What did she look like? Was she young or old?'

'Well, sir, what with the hurry and the crowd of people pushing about, I can't rightly say what the lady looked like. I can't call nothing to mind about her that I know of—excepting her name.'

'You remember her name!'

'Yes, sir. Her name was Lady Glyde.'

'How do you come to remember that, when you have forgotten what she looked like?'

The man smiled, and shifted his feet in some little embarrassment.

'Why, to tell you the truth, sir,' he said, 'I hadn't been long married at that time; and my wife's name, before she changed it for mine, was the same as the lady's—meaning the name of Glyde, sir. The lady mentioned it herself. "Is your name on your boxes, ma'am?" says I. "Yes," says she, "my name is on my luggage—it is Lady Glyde." "Come!" I says to myself, "I've a bad head for gentlefolks' names in general—but *this* one comes like an old friend, at any rate." I can't say nothing about the time, sir: it might be nigh on a year ago, or it mightn't. But I can swear to the stout gentleman, and swear to the lady's name.'

There was no need that he should remember the time; the date was positively established by his master's order-book. I felt at once that the means were now in my power of striking down the whole conspiracy at a blow with the irresistible weapon of plain fact. Without a moment's hesitation, I took the proprietor of the livery stables aside, and told him what the real importance was of the evidence of his order-book and the evidence of his driver. An arrangement to compensate him for the temporary loss of the man's services was easily made; and a copy of the entry in the book was taken by myself, and certified as true by the master's own signature. I left the livery stables, having settled that John Owen was to hold himself at my disposal for the next three days, or for a longer period, if necessity required it.

I now had in my possession all the papers that I

wanted; the district registrar's own copy of the certificate of death, and Sir Percival's dated letter to the Count, being safe in my pocket-book.

With this written evidence about me, and with the coachman's answers fresh in my memory, I next turned my steps, for the first time since the beginning of all my inquiries, in the direction of Mr. Kyrle's office. One of my objects, in paying him this second visit, was, necessarily, to tell him what I had done. The other, was to warn him of my resolution to take my wife to Limmeridge the next morning, and to have her publicly received and recognised in her uncle's house. I left it to Mr. Kyrle to decide, under these circumstances, and in Mr. Gilmore's absence, whether he was or was not bound, as the family solicitor, to be present, on that occasion, in the family interests.

I will say nothing of Mr. Kyrle's amazement, or of the terms in which he expressed his opinion of my conduct, from the first stage of the investigation to the last. It is only necessary to mention that he at once decided on accompanying us to Cumberland.

We started the next morning, by the early train. Laura, Marian, Mr. Kyrle, and myself in one carriage; and John Owen, with a clerk from Mr. Kyrle's office, occupying places in another. On reaching the Limmeridge station, we went first to the farm-house at Todd's Corner. It was my firm determination that Laura should not enter her uncle's house till she appeared there publicly recognised as his niece. I left Marian to settle the question of accommodation with Mrs. Todd, as soon as the good woman had recovered from the bewilderment of hearing what our errand was in Cumberland; and I arranged with her husband that John Owen was to be committed to the ready hospitality

of the farm-servants. These preliminaries completed, Mr. Kyrle and I set forth together for Limmeridge House.

I cannot write at any length of our interview with Mr. Fairlie, for I cannot recall it to mind, without feelings of impatience and contempt, which make the scene, even in remembrance only, utterly repulsive to me. I prefer to record simply that I carried my point. Mr. Fairlie attempted to treat us on his customary plan. We passed without notice his polite insolence at the outset of the interview. We heard without sympathy the protestations with which he tried next to persuade us that the disclosure of the conspiracy had overwhelmed him. He absolutely whined and whimpered, at last, like a fretful child. 'How was he to know that his niece was alive, when he was told that she was dead? He would welcome dear Laura, with pleasure, if we would only allow him time to recover. Did we think he looked as if he wanted hurrying into his grave? No. Then, why hurry him?' He reiterated these remonstrances at every available opportunity, until I checked them once for all, by placing him firmly between two inevitable alternatives. I gave him his choice between doing his niece justice, on my terms—or facing the consequences of a public assertion of her existence in a court of law. Mr. Kyrle, to whom he turned for help, told him plainly that he must decide the question, then and there. Characteristically choosing the alternative which promised soonest to release him from all personal anxiety, he announced, with a sudden outburst of energy, that he was not strong enough to bear any more bullying, and that we might do as we pleased.

Mr. Kyrle and I at once went down-stairs, and agreed upon a form of letter which was to be sent round to the tenants who had attended the false funeral, sum-

moning them, in Mr. Fairlie's name, to assemble in Limmeridge House, on the next day but one. An order, referring to the same date, was also written, directing a statuary in Carlisle to send a man to Limmeridge churchyard, for the purpose of erasing an inscription—Mr. Kyrle, who had arranged to sleep in the house, undertaking that Mr. Fairlie should hear these letters read to him, and should sign them with his own hand.

I occupied the interval day, at the farm, in writing a plain narrative of the conspiracy, and in adding to it a statement of the practical contradiction which facts offered to the assertion of Laura's death. This I submitted to Mr. Kyrle, before I read it, the next day, to the assembled tenants. We also arranged the form in which the evidence should be presented at the close of the reading. After these matters were settled, Mr. Kyrle endeavoured to turn the conversation, next, to Laura's affairs. Knowing, and desiring to know, nothing of those affairs; and doubting whether he would approve, as a man of business, of my conduct in relation to my wife's life-interest in the legacy left to Madame Fosco, I begged Mr. Kyrle to excuse me if I abstained from discussing the subject. It was connected, as I could truly tell him, with those sorrows and troubles of the past, which we never referred to among ourselves, and which we instinctively shrank from discussing with others.

My last labour, as the evening approached, was to obtain 'The Narrative of the Tombstone,' by taking a copy of the false inscription on the grave, before it was erased.

The day came—the day when Laura once more entered the familiar breakfast-room at Limmeridge

House. All the persons assembled rose from their seats as Marian and I led her in. A perceptible shock of surprise, an audible murmur of interest, ran through them, at the sight of her face. Mr. Fairlie was present (by my express stipulation), with Mr. Kyrle by his side. His valet stood behind him with a smelling-bottle ready in one hand, and a white handkerchief, saturated with eau-de-Cologne, in the other.

I opened the proceedings by publicly appealing to Mr. Fairlie to say whether I appeared there with his authority and under his express sanction. He extended an arm, on either side, to Mr. Kyrle and to his valet; was by them assisted to stand on his legs; and then expressed himself in these terms: 'Allow me to present Mr. Hartright. I am as great an invalid as ever; and he is so very obliging as to speak for me. The subject is dreadfully embarrassing. Please hear him—and don't make a noise!' With those words, he slowly sank back again into the chair, and took refuge in his scented pocket-handkerchief.

The disclosure of the conspiracy followed—after I had offered my preliminary explanation, first of all, in the fewest and the plainest words. I was there present (I informed my hearers) to declare first, that my wife, then sitting by me, was the daughter of the late Mr. Philip Fairlie; secondly, to prove by positive facts, that the funeral which they had attended in Limmeridge churchyard, was the funeral of another woman; thirdly, to give them a plain account of how it had all happened. Without further preface, I at once read the narrative of the conspiracy, describing it in clear outline, and dwelling only upon the pecuniary motive for it, in order to avoid complicating my statement by unnecessary reference to Sir Percival's secret. This done, I reminded my

audience of the date on the inscription in the churchyard (the 25th), and confirmed its correctness by producing the certificate of death. I then read them Sir Percival's letter of the 25th, announcing his wife's intended journey from Hampshire to London on the 26th. I next showed that she had taken that journey, by the personal testimony of the driver of the fly; and I proved that she had performed it on the appointed day, by the order-book at the livery stables. Marian then added her own statement of the meeting between Laura and herself at the madhouse, and of her sister's escape. After which I closed the proceedings by informing the persons present of Sir Percival's death, and of my marriage.

Mr. Kyrle rose, when I resumed my seat, and declared, as the legal adviser of the family, that my case was proved by the plainest evidence he had ever heard in his life. As he spoke those words, I put my arm round Laura, and raised her so that she was plainly visible to every one in the room. 'Are you all of the same opinion?' I asked, advancing towards them a few steps, and pointing to my wife.

The effect of the question was electrical. Far down at the lower end of the room, one of the oldest tenants on the estate started to his feet, and led the rest with him in an instant. I see the man now, with his honest brown face and his iron-grey hair, mounted on the window seat, waving his heavy riding-whip over his head, and leading the cheers. 'There she is alive and hearty—God bless her! Gi' it tongue, lads! Gi' it tongue!' The shout that answered him, reiterated again and again, was the sweetest music I ever heard. The labourers in the village and the boys from the school, assembled on the lawn, caught up the cheering

and echoed it back on us. The farmers' wives clustered round Laura, and struggled which should be first to shake hands with her, and to implore her, with the tears pouring over their own cheeks, to bear up bravely and not to cry. She was so completely overwhelmed, that I was obliged to take her from them, and carry her to the door. There I gave her into Marian's care—Marian, who had never failed us yet, whose courageous self-control did not fail us now. Left by myself at the door, I invited all the persons present (after thanking them in Laura's name and mine) to follow me to the churchyard, and see the false inscription struck off the tombstone with their own eyes.

They all left the house, and all joined the throng of villagers collected round the grave, where the statuary's man was waiting for us. In a breathless silence, the first sharp stroke of the steel sounded on the marble. Not a voice was heard; not a soul moved, till those three words, 'Laura, Lady Glyde,' had vanished from sight. Then, there was a great heave of relief among the crowd, as if they felt that the last fetters of the conspiracy had been struck off Laura herself—and the assembly slowly withdrew. It was late in the day before the whole inscription was erased. One line only was afterwards engraved in its place: 'Anne Catherick, July 25th, 1850.'

I returned to Limmeridge House early enough in the evening to take leave of Mr. Kyrle. He, and his clerk, and the driver of the fly, went back to London by the night train. On their departure, an insolent message was delivered to me from Mr. Fairlie—who had been carried from the room in a shattered condition, when the first outbreak of cheering answered my appeal to the tenantry. The message conveyed to us 'Mr. Fair-

lie's best congratulations,' and requested to know whether 'we contemplated stopping in the house.' I sent back word that the only object for which we had entered his doors was accomplished; that I contemplated stopping in no man's house but my own; and that Mr. Fairlie need not entertain the slightest apprehension of ever seeing us, or hearing from us again. We went back to our friends at the farm, to rest that night; and the next morning—escorted to the station, with the heartiest enthusiasm and good will, by the whole village and by all the farmers in the neighbourhood—we returned to London.

As our view of the Cumberland hills faded in the distance, I thought of the first disheartening circumstances under which the long struggle that was now past and over had been pursued. It was strange to look back and to see, now, that the poverty which had denied us all hope of assistance, had been the indirect means of our success, by forcing me to act for myself. If we had been rich enough to find legal help, what would have been the result? The gain (on Mr. Kyrle's own showing) would have been more than doubtful; the loss—judging by the plain test of events as they had really happened—certain. The Law would never have obtained me my interview with Mrs. Catherick. The Law would never have made Pesca the means of forcing a confession from the Count.

II.

Two more events remain to be added to the chain, before it reaches fairly from the outset of the story to the close.

While our new sense of freedom from the long oppres-

sion of the past was still strange to us, I was sent for by the friend who had given me my first employment in wood engraving, to receive from him a fresh testimony of his regard for my welfare. He had been commissioned by his employers to go to Paris, and to examine for them a French discovery in the practical application of his Art, the merits of which they were anxious to ascertain. His own engagements had not allowed him leisure time to undertake the errand; and he had most kindly suggested that it should be transferred to me. I could have no hesitation in thankfully accepting the offer; for if I acquitted myself of my commission as I hoped I should, the result would be a permanent engagement on the illustrated newspaper, to which I was now only occasionally attached.

I received my instructions and packed up for the journey the next day. On leaving Laura once more (under what changed circumstances!) in her sister's care, a serious consideration recurred to me, which had more than once crossed my wife's mind, as well as my own, already—I mean the consideration of Marian's future. Had we any right to let our selfish affection accept the devotion of all that generous life? Was it not our duty, our best expression of gratitude, to forget ourselves, and to think only of *her*? I tried to say this, when we were alone for a moment, before I went away. She took my hand, and silenced me at the first words.

'After all that we three have suffered together,' she said, 'there can be no parting between us, till the last parting of all. My heart and my happiness, Walter, are with Laura and you. Wait a little till there are children's voices at your fireside. I will teach them to speak for me, in *their* language; and the first lesson they

say to their father and mother shall be—We can't spare our aunt!'

My journey to Paris was not undertaken alone. At the eleventh hour, Pesca decided that he would accompany me. He had not recovered his customary cheerfulness since the night at the Opera; and he determined to try what a week's holiday would do to raise his spirits.

I performed the errand entrusted to me, and drew out the necessary report, on the fourth day from our arrival in Paris. The fifth day, I arranged to devote to sight-seeing and amusements in Pesca's company.

Our hotel had been too full to accommodate us both on the same floor. My room was on the second story, and Pesca's was above me, on the third. On the morning of the fifth day, I went up-stairs to see if the Professor was ready to go out. Just before I reached the landing, I saw his door opened from the inside; a long, delicate, nervous hand (not my friend's hand certainly) held it ajar. At the same time I heard Pesca's voice saying eagerly, in low tones, and in his own language: 'I remember the name, but I don't know the man. You saw at the Opera, he was so changed that I could not recognise him. I will forward the report—I can do no more,' 'No more need be done,' answered a second voice. The door opened wide; and the light-haired man with the scar on his cheek—the man I had seen following Count Fosco's cab a week before—came out. He bowed, as I drew aside to let him pass—his face was fearfully pale—and he held fast by the banisters, as he descended the stairs.

I pushed open the door, and entered Pesca's room. He was crouched up, in the strangest manner, in a cor-

ner of the sofa. He seemed to shrink from me, when I approached him.

'Am I disturbing you?' I asked. 'I did not know you had a friend with you till I saw him come out.'

'No friend,' said Pesca, eagerly. 'I see him to-day for the first time, and the last.'

'I am afraid he has brought you bad news?'

'Horrible news, Walter! Let us go back to London —I don't want to stop here—I am sorry I ever came. The misfortunes of my youth are very hard upon me,' he said, turning his face to the wall; 'very hard upon me, in my later time. I try to forget them—and they will not forget *me!*'

'We can't return, I am afraid, before the afternoon,' I replied. 'Would you like to come out with me, in the mean time?'

'No, my friend; I will wait here. But let us go back to-day—pray let us go back.'

I left him with the assurance that he should leave Paris that afternoon. We had arranged, the evening before, to ascend the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, with Victor Hugo's noble romance for our guide. There was nothing in the French capital that I was more anxious to see—and I departed by myself for the church.

Approaching Notre-Dame by the river-side, I passed, on my way, the terrible dead-house of Paris—the Morgue. A great crowd clamoured and heaved round the door. There was evidently something inside which excited the popular curiosity, and fed the popular appetite for horror.

I should have walked on to the church, if the conversation of two men and a woman on the outskirts of the crowd had not caught my ear. They had just come out from seeing the sight in the Morgue; and the account

they were giving of the dead body to their neighbours, described it as the corpse of a man—a man of immense size, with a strange mark on his left arm.

The moment those words reached me, I stopped, and took my place with the crowd going in. Some dim foreshadowing of the truth had crossed my mind, when I heard Pesca's voice through the open door, and when I saw the stranger's face as he passed me on the stairs of the hotel. Now, the truth itself was revealed to me—revealed, in the chance words that had just reached my ears. Other vengeance than mine had followed that fated man from the theatre to his own door; from his own door to his refuge in Paris. Other vengeance than mine had called him to the day of reckoning, and had exacted from him the penalty of his life. The moment when I had pointed him out to Pesca at the theatre, in the hearing of that stranger by our side, who was looking for him too—was the moment that sealed his doom. I remembered the struggle in my own heart, when he and I stood face to face—the struggle before I could let him escape me—and shuddered as I recalled it.

Slowly, inch by inch, I pressed in with the crowd, moving nearer and nearer to the great glass screen that parts the dead from the living at the Morgue—nearer and nearer, till I was close behind the front row of spectators, and could look in.

There he lay, unowned, unknown; exposed to the flippant curiosity of a French mob! There was the dreadful end of that long life of degraded ability and heartless crime! Hushed in the sublime repose of death, the broad, firm, massive face and head fronted us so grandly, that the chattering Frenchwomen about me lifted their hands in admiration, and cried in shrill chorus, 'Ah, what a handsome man!' The wound that

had killed him had been struck with a knife or dagger exactly over his heart. No other traces of violence appeared about the body, except on the left arm, and there, exactly in the place where I had seen the brand on Pesca's arm, were two deep cuts in the shape of the letter T, which entirely obliterated the mark of the Brotherhood. His clothes, hung above him, showed that he had been himself conscious of his danger—they were clothes that had disguised him as a French artisan. For a few moments, but not for longer, I forced myself to see these things through the glass screen. I can write of them at no greater length, for I saw no more.

The few facts in connexion with his death which I subsequently ascertained (partly from Pesca and partly from other sources), may he stated here, before the subject is dismissed from these pages.

His body was taken out of the Seine, in the disguise which I have described, nothing being found on him which revealed his name, his rank, or his place of abode. The hand that struck him was never traced, and the circumstances under which he was killed were never discovered. I leave others to draw their own conclusions, in reference to the secret of the assassination, as I have drawn mine. When I have intimated that the foreigner with the scar was a Member of the Brotherhood (admitted in Italy, after Pesca's departure from his native country), and when I have further added that the two cuts, in the form of a T, on the left arm of the dead man, signified the Italian word, 'Traditore,' and showed that justice had been done by the Brotherhood on a traitor, I have contributed all that I know towards elucidating the mystery of Count Fosco's death.

The body was identified, the day after I had seen it,

by means of an anonymous letter addressed to his wife. He was buried, by Madame Fosco, in the cemetery of Père-Lachaise. Fresh funeral wreaths continue, to this day, to be hung on the ornamental bronze railings round the tomb, by the Countess's own hand. She lives, in the strictest retirement, at Versailles. Not long since, she published a Biography of her deceased husband. The work throws no light whatever on the name that was really his own, or on the secret history of his life; it is almost entirely devoted to the praise of his domestic virtues, the assertion of his rare abilities, and the enumeration of the honours conferred on him. The circumstances attending his death are very briefly noticed; and are summed up, on the last page, in this sentence:—'His life was one long assertion of the rights of the aristocracy and the sacred principles of Order—and he died a Martyr to his cause.'

III.

The summer and autumn passed, after my return from Paris, and brought no changes with them which need be noticed here. We lived so simply and quietly, that the income which I was now steadily earning sufficed for all our wants.

In the February of the new year, our first child was born—a son. My mother and sister and Mrs. Vesey were our guests at the little christening party; and Mrs. Clements was present, to assist my wife, on the same occasion. Marian was our boy's godmother; and Pesca and Mr. Gilmore (the latter acting by proxy) were his godfathers. I may add here, that when Mr. Gilmore returned to us, a year later, he assisted the design of these pages, at my request, by writing the

Narrative which appears early in the story under his name, and which, though first in order of precedence, was thus, in order of time, the last that I received.

The only event in our lives which now remains to be recorded, occurred when our little Walter was six months old.

At that time, I was sent to Ireland, to make sketches for certain forthcoming illustrations in the newspaper to which I was attached. I was away for nearly a fortnight, corresponding regularly with my wife and Marian, except during the last three days of my absence, when my movements were too uncertain to enable me to receive letters. I performed the latter part of my journey back, at night; and when I reached home in the morning, to my utter astonishment, there was no one to receive me. Laura and Marian and the child had left the house on the day before my return.

A note from my wife, which was given to me by the servant, only increased my surprise, by informing me that they had gone to Limmeridge House. Marian had prohibited any attempt at written explanations—I was entreated to follow them the moment I came back—complete enlightenment awaited me on my arrival in Cumberland—and I was forbidden to feel the slightest anxiety, in the mean time. There the note ended.

It was still early enough to catch the morning train. I reached Limmeridge House the same afternoon.

My wife and Marian were both up-stairs. They had established themselves (by way of completing my amazement) in the little room which had been once assigned to me for a studio, when I was employed on Mr. Fairlie's drawings. On the very chair which I used to occupy when I was at work, Marian was sitting now, with the child industriously sucking his coral upon

her lap—while Laura was standing by the well-remembered drawing-table which I had so often used, with the little album that I had filled for her, in past times, open under her hand.

'What in the name of Heaven has brought you here?' I asked. 'Does Mr. Fairlie know——?'

Marian suspended the question on my lips, by telling me that Mr. Fairlie was dead. He had been struck by paralysis, and had never rallied after the shock. Mr. Kyrle had informed them of his death, and had advised them to proceed immediately to Limmeridge House.

Some dim perception of a great change dawned on my mind. Laura spoke before I had quite realised it. She stole close to me, to enjoy the surprise which was still expressed in my face.

'My darling Walter,' she said, 'must we really account for our boldness in coming here? I am afraid, love, I can only explain it by breaking through our rule, and referring to the past.'

'There is not the least necessity for doing anything of the kind,' said Marian. 'We can be just as explicit, and much more interesting, by referring to the future.' She rose; and held up the child, kicking and crowing in her arms. 'Do you know who this is, Walter?' she asked, with bright tears of happiness gathering in her eyes.

'Even *my* bewilderment has its limits,' I replied. 'I think I can still answer for knowing my own child.'

'Child!' she exclaimed, with all her easy gaiety of old times. 'Do you talk in that familiar manner of one of the landed gentry of England? Are you aware when I present this illustrious baby to your notice, in whose presence you stand? Evidently not! Let me make

two eminent personages known to one another; Mr. Walter Hartright—*the Heir of Limmeridge.*'

So she spoke. In writing those last words, I have written all. The pen falters in my hand; the long, happy labour of many months is over! Marian was the good angel of our lives —let Marian end our Story.

THE END